Remembering the Kanji

VOL. 1

A Complete Course on How Not to Forget the Meaning and Writing of Japanese Characters

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Contents

Introduction

The aim of this book is to provide the student of Japanese with a simple method for correlating the writing and the meaning of Japanese characters in such a way as to make them both easy to remember. It is intended not only for the beginner, but also for the more advanced student looking for some relief to the constant frustration of forgetting how to write the kanji and some way to systematize what he or she already knows. By showing how to break down the complexities of the Japanese writing system into its basic elements and suggesting ways to reconstruct meanings from those elements, the method offers a new perspective from which to learn the kanji.

There are, of course, many things that the pages of this book will not do for you. You will read nothing about how kanji combine to form compounds. Nor is anything said about the various ways to pronounce the characters. Furthermore, all questions of grammatical usage have been omitted. These are all matters that need specialized treatment in their own right. Meantime, remembering the meaning and the writing of the kanji—perhaps the single most difficult barrier to learning Japanese—can be greatly simplified if the two are isolated and studied apart from everything else.

Forgetting kanji, remembering kanji

What makes forgetting the kanji so natural is their *lack of connection with normal patterns of visual memory.* We are used to hills and roads, to the faces of people and the skylines of cities, to flowers, animals, and the phenomena of nature. And while only a fraction of what we see is readily recalled, we are confident that, given proper attention, anything we choose to remember, we can. That confidence is lacking in the world of the kanji. The closest approximation to the kind of memory patterns required by the kanji is to be seen in the various alphabets and number-systems we know. The difference is that while these symbols are very few and often sound-related, the kanji number in the thousands and have no consistent phonetic value. Nonetheless, traditional methods for learning the characters have been the same as those for learning alphabets: drill the shapes one by one, again and again, year after year. Whatever ascetic value there is in such an exercise, the more efficient way would be to relate the characters to something other than their sounds

in the first place, and so to break ties with the visual memory we rely on for learning our alphabets.

The origins of the Japanese writing system can be traced back to ancient China and the eighteenth century before the Christian era. In the form in which we find Chinese writing codified some 1,000 years later, it was made up largely of pictographic, detailed glyphs. These were further transformed and stylized down through the centuries, so that by the time the Japanese were introduced to the kanji by Buddhist monks from Korea and started experimenting with ways to adapt the Chinese writing system to their own language (about the fourth to seventh centuries of our era), they were already dealing with far more ideographic and abstract forms. The Japanese made their own contributions and changes in time, as was to be expected. And like every modern Oriental culture that uses the kanji, they continue to do so, though now more in matters of usage than form.

So fascinating is this story that many recommend studying etymology as a way to remember the kanji. Alas, the student quickly learns the many disadvantages of such an approach. As charming as it is to see the ancient drawing of a woman etched behind its respective kanji, or to discover the rudimentary form of a hand or a tree or a house, when the character itself is removed, the clear visual memory of the familiar object is precious little help for recalling how to write it. Proper etymological studies are most helpful *after* one has learned the general-use kanji. Before that, they only add to one's memory problems. We need a still more radical departure from visual memory.

Let me paint the impasse in another, more graphic, way. Picture yourself holding a kaleidoscope up to the light as still as possible, trying to fix in memory the particular pattern that the play of light and mirrors and colored stones has created. Chances are you have such an untrained memory for such things that it will take some time; but let us suppose that you succeed after ten or fifteen minutes. You close your eyes, trace the pattern in your head, and then check your image against the original pattern until you are sure you have it remembered. Then someone passes by and jars your elbow. The pattern is lost, and in its place a new jumble appears. Immediately your memory begins to scramble. You set the kaleidoscope aside, sit down, and try to draw what you had just memorized, but to no avail. There is simply nothing left in memory to grab hold of. The kanji are like that. One can sit at one's desk and drill a half dozen characters for an hour or two, only to discover on the morrow that when something similar is seen, the former memory is erased or hopelessly confused by the new information.

Now the odd thing is not that this occurs, but rather that, instead of openly admitting one's distrust of purely visual memory, one accuses oneself of a

poor memory or lack of discipline and keeps on following the same routine. Thus, by placing the blame on a poor visual memory, one overlooks the possibility of another form of memory that could handle the task with relative ease: *imaginative memory.*

By imaginative memory I mean the faculty to recall images created purely in the mind, with no actual or remembered visual stimuli behind them. When we recall our dreams we are using imaginative memory. The fact that we sometimes conflate what happened in waking life with what occurred merely in a dream is an indication of how powerful those imaginative stimuli can be. While dreams may be broken up into familiar component parts, the composite whole is fantastical and yet capable of exerting the same force on perceptual memory as an external stimulus. It is possible to use imagination in this way also in a waking state and harness its powers for assisting a visual memory admittedly ill-adapted for remembering the kanji.

In other words, if we could discover a limited number of basic elements in the characters and make a kind of alphabet out of them, assigning each its own image, fusing them together to form other images, and so building up complex tableaux in imagination, the impasse created by purely visual memory might be overcome. Such an imaginative alphabet would be every bit as rigorous as a phonetic one in restricting each basic element to one basic value; but its grammar would lack many of the controls of ordinary language and logic. It would be a kind of dream-world where anything at all might happen, and happen differently in each mind. Visual memory would be used minimally, to build up the alphabet. After that, one would be set loose to roam freely inside the magic lantern of imaginative patterns according to one's own preferences.

In fact, most students of the Japanese writing system do something similar from time to time, devising their own mnemonic aids but never developing an organized approach to their use. At the same time, most of them would be embarrassed at the academic silliness of their own secret devices, feeling somehow that there is no way to refine the ridiculous ways their mind works. Yet if it *does* work, then some such irreverence for scholarship and tradition seems very much in place. Indeed, shifting attention from why one *forgets* certain kanji to why one *remembers* others should offer motivation enough to undertake a more thorough attempt to systematize imaginative memory.

The structure of this book

The basic alphabet of the imaginative world hidden in the kanji we may call, following traditional terminology, *primitive elements* (or simply *primitives*). These are not to be confused with the so-called "radicals" which form the basis of etymological studies of sound and meaning, and now are

used for the lexical ordering of the characters. In fact, most of the radicals are themselves primitives, but the number of primitives is not restricted to the traditional list of radicals.

The primitives, then, are the fundamental strokes and combinations of strokes from which all the characters are built up. Calligraphically speaking, there are only nine possible kinds of strokes in theory, seventeen in practice. A few of these will be given *primitive meanings;* that is, they will serve as fundamental images. Simple combinations will yield new primitive meanings in turn, and so on as complex characters are built up. If these primitives are presented in orderly fashion, the taxonomy of the most complex characters is greatly simplified and no attempt need be made to memorize the primitive alphabet apart from actually using it.

The number of primitives, as we are understanding the term, is a moot question. Traditional etymology counts some 224 of them. We shall draw upon these freely, and also ground our primitive meanings in traditional etymological meanings, without making any particular note of the fact as we proceed. We shall also be departing from etymology to avoid the confusion caused by the great number of similar meanings for differently shaped primitives. Wherever possible, then, the generic meaning of the primitives will be preserved, although there are cases in which we shall have to specify that meaning in a different way, or ignore it altogether, so as to root imaginative memory in familiar visual memories. Should the student later turn to etymological studies, the procedure we have followed will become more transparent, and should not cause any obstacles to the learning of etymologies. The list of elements that we have singled out as primitives proper (Index II) is restricted to the following four classes: basic elements that are not kanji, kanji that appear as basic elements in other kanji with great frequency, kanji that change their meaning when they function as parts of other kanji, and kanji that change their shape when forming parts of other kanji. Any kanji that keeps both its form and its meaning and appears as part of another kanji *functions* as a primitive, whether or not it occurs with enough frequency to draw attention to it as such.

The 2,200 characters chosen for study in these pages (given in the order of presentation in Index I and arranged according to the number of strokes in Index III) include the basic 1,945 general-use kanji established as standard by the Japanese Ministry of Education in 1981, another 60 or so used chiefly in proper names, and a handful of characters that are convenient for use as primitive elements. In 2010 another 196 kanji were added to the list of kanji approved for general use, 39 of which had already been incorporated into earlier editions of this book.

Each kanji is assigned a *key word* that represents its basic meaning, or one of its basic meanings. The key words have been selected on the basis of how a given kanji is used in compounds and on the meaning it has on its own. (A total of 190 of the kanji that appear in this book are used commonly in family and personal names, and some of them have no other use in standard Japanese. Nevertheless, each of them has been assigned its own key word.) There is no repetition of key words, although many are nearly synonymous. In these cases, it is important to focus on the particular flavor that that word enjoys in English, so as to evoke connotations distinct from similar key words. To be sure, many of the characters carry a side range of connotations not present in their English equivalents, and vice versa; many even carry several ideas not able to be captured in a single English word. By simplifying the meanings through the use of key words, however, one becomes familiar with a kanji and at least one of its principal meanings. The others can be added later with relative ease, in much the same way as one enriches one's understanding of one's native tongue by learning the full range of feelings and meanings embraced by words already known.

Given the primitive meanings and the key word relevant to a particular kanji (cataloged in Index IV), the task is to create a composite ideogram. Here is where fantasy and memory come into play. The aim is to shock the mind's eye, to disgust it, to enchant it, to tease it, or to entertain it in any way possible so as to brand it with an image intimately associated with the key word. That image, in turn, inasmuch as it is composed of primitive meanings, will dictate precisely how the kanji is to be penned—stroke for stroke, jot for jot. Many characters, perhaps the majority of them, can be so remembered on a first encounter, provided sufficient time is taken to fix the image. Others will need to be reviewed by focusing on the association of key word and primitive elements. In this way, mere drill of visual memory is all but entirely eliminated.

Since the goal is not simply to remember a certain number of kanji, but also to learn *how* to remember them (and others not included in this book), the course has been divided into three parts. Part One provides the full associative story for each character. By directing the reader's attention, at least for the length of time it takes to read the explanation and relate it to the written form of the kanji, most of the work is done for the student, even as a feeling for the method is acquired. In Part Two, only the skeletal plots of the stories are presented, and the individual must work out his or her own details by drawing on personal memory and fantasy. Part Three, which comprises the major portion of the course, provides only the key word and the primitive meanings, leaving the remainder of the process to the student.

It will soon become apparent that the most critical factor is the *order of*

learning the kanji. The actual method is simplicity itself. Once more basic characters have been learned, their use as primitive elements for other kanji can save a great deal of effort and enable one to review known characters at the same time as one is learning new ones. Hence, to approach this course haphazardly, jumping ahead to the later lessons before studying the earlier ones, will entail a considerable loss of efficiency. If one's goal is to learn to write the entire list of general-use characters, then it seems best to learn them in the order best suited to memory, not in order of frequency or according to the order in which they are taught to Japanese children. Should the individual decide to pursue some other course, however, the indexes should provide all the basic information for finding the appropriate frame and the primitives referred to in that frame.

It may surprise the reader casually leafing through these pages not to find a single drawing or pictographic representation. This is fully consistent with what was said earlier about placing the stress on imaginative memory. For one thing, pictographs are an unreliable way to remember all but very few kanji; and even in these cases, the pictograph should be *discovered* by the student by toying with the forms, pen in hand, rather than *given* in one of its historical graphic forms. For another, the presentation of an image actually inhibits imagination and restricts it to the biases of the artist. This is as true for the illustrations in a child's collection of fairy tales as it is for the various phenomena we shall encounter in the course of this book. The more original work the individual does with an image, the easier will it be to remember a kanji.

Admonitions

Before setting out on the course plotted in the following pages, attention should be drawn to a few final points. In the first place, one must be warned about setting out too quickly. It should not be assumed that, because the first characters are so elementary, they can be skipped over hastily. The method presented here needs to be learned step by step, lest one find oneself forced later to retreat to the first stages and start over; 20 or 25 characters per day would not be excessive for someone who has only a couple of hours to give to study. If one were to study them full-time, there is no reason why the entire course could not be completed successfully in four to six weeks. By the time Part One has been traversed, the student should have discovered a rate of progress suitable to the time available.

Second, repeated instruction to study the characters with pad and pencil should be taken seriously. Remembering the characters demands that they be written, and there is really no better way to improve the aesthetic appearance of one's writing and acquire a "natural feel" for the flow of the kanji than by

writing them. The method may spare one from having to write the same character over and over in order to learn it, but it does not give one the fluency at writing that comes only with constant practice. If pen and paper are inconvenient, one can always make do with the palm of the hand, as the Japanese do. It provides a convenient square space for jotting on with one's index finger when riding in a bus or walking down the street.

Third, the kanji are best reviewed by beginning with the key word, progressing to the respective story, and then writing the character itself. Once one has been able to perform these steps, reversing the order follows as a matter of course. More will be said about this later in the book.

In the fourth place, it is important to note that the best order for *learning* the kanji is by no means the best order for *remembering* them. They need to be recalled when and where they are met, not in the sequence in which they are presented here. For that purpose, recommendations are given in Lesson 5 for designing flash cards for random review.

Finally, it seems worthwhile to give some brief thought to any ambitions one might have about "mastering" the Japanese writing system. The idea arises from, or at least is supported by, a certain bias about learning that comes from overexposure to schooling: the notion that language is a cluster of skills that can be rationally divided, systematically learned, and certified by testing. The kanji, together with the wider structure of Japanese—and indeed of *any* language for that matter—resolutely refuse to be mastered in this fashion. The rational order brought to the kanji in this book is only intended as an aid to get you close enough to the characters to befriend them, let them surprise you, inspire you, enlighten you, resist you, and seduce you. But they cannot be mastered without a full understanding of their long and complex history and an insight into the secret of their unpredictable vitality—all of which is far too much for a single mind to bring to the tip of a single pen.

That having been said, the goal of this book is still to attain native proficiency in writing the Japanese characters and associating their meanings with their forms. If the logical systematization and the playful irreverence contained in the pages that follow can help spare even a few of those who pick the book up the grave error of deciding to pursue their study of the Japanese language without aspiring to such proficiency, the efforts that went into it will have more than received their reward.

Self-study and classroom study

As this book went through one reprint after the other, I was often tempted to rethink many of the key words and primitive meaning. After careful consideration and review of the hundred of letters I received from students

all over the world, and in the light of the many adjustments required for versions in other languages, I decided to let it stand with only minor alterations. There are, however, two related questions that come up with enough frequency to merit further comment at the outset: the use of this book in connection with formal courses of Japanese, and the matter of pronunciation or "readings" of the kanji.

The reader will not have to finish more than a few lessons to realize that this book was designed for self-learning. What may not be so apparent is that *using it to supplement the study of kanji in the classroom or to review for examinations has an adverse influence on the learning process.* The more you try to combine the study of the written kanji through the method outlined in these pages with traditional study of the kanji, the less good this book will do you. I know of no exceptions.

Virtually all teachers of Japanese, native and foreign, would agree with me that learning to write the kanji with native proficiency is the greatest single obstacle to the foreign adult approaching Japanese—indeed so great as to be *presumed* insurmountable. After all, if even well-educated Japanese study the characters formally for nine years, use them daily, and yet frequently have trouble remembering how to reproduce them, much more than English-speaking people have with the infamous spelling of their mother tongue, is it not unrealistic to expect that even with the best of intentions and study methods those not raised with the kanji from their youth should manage the feat? Such an attitude may never actually be spoken openly by a teacher standing before a class, but as long as the teacher believes it, it readily becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. This attitude is then transmitted to the student by placing greater emphasis on the supposedly simpler and more reasonable skills of learning to speak and read the language. In fact, as this book seeks to demonstrate, nothing could be further from the truth.

To begin with, the writing of the kanji is the most completely rational part of the language. Over the centuries, the writing of the kanji has been simplified many times, always with rational principles in mind. Aside from the Korean *hangul,* there may be no writing system in the world as logically structured as the Sino-Japanese characters are. The problem is that the usefulness of this inner logic has not found its way into learning the kanji. On the contrary, it has been systematically ignored. Those who have passed through the Japanese school system tend to draw on their own experience when they teach others how to write. Having begun as small children in whom the powers of abstraction are relatively undeveloped and for whom constant repetition is the only workable method, they are not likely ever to have considered reor-

ganizing their pedagogy to take advantage of the older student's facility with generalized principles.

So great is this neglect that I would have to say that I have never met a Japanese teacher who can claim to have taught a foreign adult to write the basic general-use kanji that all high-school graduates in Japan know. Never. Nor have I ever met a foreign adult who would claim to have learned to write at this level from a native Japanese teacher. I see no reason to assume that the Japanese are better suited to teach writing because it is, after all, their language. Given the rational nature of the kanji, precisely the opposite is the case: the Japanese teacher is an impediment to learning to associate the meanings of the kanji with their written form. The obvious victim of the conventional methods is the student, but on a subtler level the reconfirmation of unquestioned biases also victimizes the Japanese teachers themselves, the most devoted of whom are prematurely denied the dream of fully internationalizing their language.

There are additional problems with using this book in connection with classroom study. For one thing, as explained earlier in the Introduction, the efficiency of the study of the kanji is directly related to the order in which they are learned. Formal courses introduce kanji according to different principles that have nothing to do with the writing. More often than not, the order in which Japan's Ministry of Education has determined children should learn the kanji from primary through middle school, is the main guide. Obviously, learning the writing is far more important than being certified to have passed some course or other. And just as obviously, one needs to know *all* the general-use kanji for them to be of any use for the literate adult. When it comes to reading basic materials, such as newspapers, it is little consolation to know half or even three-quarters of them. The crucial question for pedagogy, therefore, is not what is the best way to qualify at some intermediate level of proficiency, but simply how to learn all the kanji in the most efficient and reliable manner possible. For this, the traditional "levels" of kanji proficiency are simply irrelevant. The answer, I am convinced, lies in self-study, following an order based on learning all the kanji.

I do not myself know of any teacher of Japanese who has attempted to use this book in a classroom setting. My suspicion is that they would soon abandon the idea. The book is based on the idea that the writing of the kanji can be learned on its own and independently of any other aspect of the language. It is also based on the idea that the pace of study is different from one individual to another, and for each individual, from one week to the next. Organizing study to the routines of group instruction runs counter to those ideas.

This brings us to our second question. The reasons for isolating the writing

of the kanji from their pronunciation follow more or less as a matter of course from what has been said. The reading and writing of the characters are taught simultaneously on the grounds that one is useless without the other. This only begs the basic question of why they could not better, and more quickly, be taught one *after* the other, concentrating on what is for the foreigner the simpler task, writing, and later turning to the more complicated, the reading.

One has only to look at the progress of non-Japanese raised with kanji to see the logic of the approach. When Chinese adult students come to the study of Japanese, they already know what the kanji mean and how to write them. They have only to learn how to read them. The progress they make in comparison with their Western counterparts is usually attributed to their being "Oriental." In fact, Chinese grammar and pronunciation have about as much to do with Japanese as English does. It is their knowledge of the meaning and writing of the kanji that gives the Chinese the decisive edge. My idea was simply to learn from this common experience and give the kanji an English reading. Having learned to write the kanji in this way—which, I repeat, is the most logical and rational part of the study of Japanese—one is in a much better position to concentrate on the often irrational and unprincipled problem of learning to pronounce them.

In a word, it is hard to imagine a *less* efficient way of learning the reading and writing of the kanji than to study them simultaneously. And yet this is the method that all Japanese textbooks and courses follow. The bias is too deeply ingrained to be rooted out by anything but experience to the contrary.

Many of these ideas and impressions, let it be said, only developed after I had myself learned the kanji and published the first edition of this book. At the time I was convinced that proficiency in writing the kanji could be attained in four to six weeks if one were to make a full-time job of it. Of course, the claim raised more eyebrows than hopes among teachers with far more experience than I had. Still, my own experience with studying the kanji and the relatively small number of individuals I have directed in the methods of this book, bears that estimate out, and I do not hesitate to repeat it here.

The story behind this book

A word about how the book came to be written. I began my study of the kanji one month after coming to Japan with absolutely no previous knowledge of the language. Because travels through Asia had delayed my arrival by several weeks, I took up residence at a language school in Kamakura and began studying on my own without enrolling in the course already in progress. A certain impatience with my own ignorance compared to everyone around me, coupled with the freedom to devote myself exclusively to language stud-

ies, helped me during those first four weeks to make my way through a basic introductory grammar. This provided a general idea of how the language was constructed but, of course, almost no facility in using any of it.

Through conversations with the teachers and other students, I quickly picked up the impression that I had best begin learning the kanji as soon as possible, since this was sure to be the greatest chore of all. Having no idea at all how the kanji "worked" in the language, yet having found my own pace, I decided—against the advice of nearly everyone around me—to continue to study on my own rather than join one of the beginners' classes.

The first few days I spent poring over whatever I could find on the history and etymology of the Japanese characters, and examining the wide variety of systems on the market for studying them. It was during those days that the basic idea underlying the method of this book came to me. The following weeks I devoted myself day and night to experimenting with the idea, which worked well enough to encourage me to carry on with it. Before the month was out I had learned the meaning and writing of some 1,900 characters and had satisfied myself that I would retain what I had memorized. It was not long before I became aware that something extraordinary had taken place.

For myself, the method I was following seemed so simple, even childish, that it was almost an embarrassment to talk about it. And it had happened as such a matter of course that I was quite unprepared for the reaction it caused. On the one hand, some at the school accused me of having a short-term photographic memory that would fade with time. On the other hand, there were those who pressed me to write up my "methods" for their benefit. But it seemed to me that there was too much left to learn of the language for me to get distracted by either side. Within a week, however, I was persuaded at least to let my notes circulate. Since most everything was either in my head or jotted illegibly in notebooks and on flash cards, I decided to give an hour each day to writing everything up systematically. One hour soon became two, then three, and in no time at all I had laid everything else aside to complete the task. By the end of that third month I brought a camera-ready copy to Nanzan University in Nagoya for printing. During the two months it took to prepare it for printing I added an Introduction.

Through the kind help of Mrs. Iwamoto Keiko of Tuttle Publishing Company, most of the 500 copies were distributed in Tokyo bookstores, where they sold out within a few months. After the month I spent studying how to write the kanji, I did not return to any formal review of what I had learned. (I was busy trying to devise another method for simplifying the study of the reading of the characters, which was later completed and published as a companion volume to this one.) When I would meet a new character, I would learn it as I

had the others, but I have never felt the need to retrace my steps or repeat any of the work. Admittedly, the fact that I now use the kanji daily in my teaching, research, and writing is a distinct advantage. But I remain convinced that whatever facility I have I owe to the procedures outlined in this book.

Perhaps only one who has seen the method through to the end can appreciate both how truly uncomplicated and obvious it is, and how accessible to any average student willing to invest the time and effort. For while the method is *simple* and does eliminate a great deal of wasted effort, the task is still not an *easy* one. It requires as much stamina, concentration, and imagination as one can bring to it.

PART ONE

Stories

Lesson 1

Let us begin with a group of 15 kanji, all of which you probably knew before you ever cracked the covers of this book. Each kanji has been provided with a single *key word* to represent the basic meaning. Some of these characters will also serve later as *primitive elements* to help form other kanji, when they will take a meaning different from the meaning they have as kanji. Although it is not necessary at this stage to memorize the special primitive meaning of these characters, a special remark preceded by a star (*) has been appended to alert you to the change in meaning.

The *number of strokes* of each character is given in square brackets at the end of each explanation, followed by the stroke-by-stroke *order of writing.* It cannot be stressed enough how important it is to learn to write each kanji in its proper order. As easy as these first characters may seem, study them all with a pad and pencil to get into the habit from the very start.

Finally, note that each key word has been carefully chosen and should not be tampered with in any way if you want to avoid confusion later on.

1 **one**

一

In Chinese characters, the number **one** is laid on its side, unlike the Roman numeral I which stands upright. As you would expect, it is written from left to right. [1]

一

* As a primitive element, the key-word meaning is discarded, since it is too abstract to be of much help. Instead, the single horizontal stroke takes on the meaning of *floor* or *ceiling,* depending on its position: if it stands above another primitive, it means *ceiling;* if below, *floor.*

2 二 **two**

Like the Roman numeral II, which reduplicates the numeral I, the kanji for **two** is a simple reduplication of the horizontal stroke that means *one.* The order of writing goes from above to below, with the first stroke slightly shorter. [2]



3 三 **three**

And like the Roman numeral III, which triples the numeral I, the kanji for **three** simply triples the single horizontal stroke. In writing it, think of "1 + 2 = 3" (一 + 二 = 三) in order to keep the middle stroke shorter. [3]



4 四 **four**

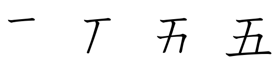
This kanji is composed of two primitive elements, *mouth* 口 and *human legs* 儿, both of which we will meet in the coming lessons. Assuming that you already knew how to write this kanji, we will pass over the "story" connected with it until later.

Note how the second stroke is written left-to-right and then top-to-bottom. This is consistent with what we have already seen in the first three numbers and leads us to a general principle that will be helpful when we come to more complicated kanji later on: WRITE NORTH-TO-SOUTH, WEST-TO-EAST, NORTHWEST-TO-SOUTHEAST. [5]



5 五 **five**

As with *four,* we shall postpone learning the primitive elements that make up this character. Note how the general principle we just learned in the preceding frame applies to the writing of the character for **five**. [4]



6

六 **six**

The primitives here are *top hat* and *animal legs*. Once again, we glide over them until later. [4]

丶 亠 六 六

7

七 **seven**

Note that the first stroke "cuts" through the second. This distinguishes **seven** from the character for *spoon* 匕 (FRAME 476), in which the horizontal stroke stops short. [2]

一 七

* As a primitive, this form takes on the meaning of *diced,* i.e., "cut" into little pieces, consistent both with the way the character is written and with its association with the kanji for *cut* 切 to be learned in a later lesson (FRAME 89).

8

八 **eight**

Just as the Arabic numeral "8" is composed of a small circle followed by a larger one, so the kanji for **eight** is composed of a short line followed by a longer line, slanting towards it but not touching it. And just as the "lazy 8" ∞ is the mathematical symbol for "infinity," so the expanse opened up below these two strokes is associated by the Japanese with the sense of an infinite expanse or something "all-encompassing." [2]

丿 八

9

九 **nine**

If you take care to remember the stroke order of this kanji, you will not have trouble later keeping it distinct from the kanji for *power* 力 (FRAME 922). [2]

丿 九

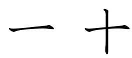
* As a primitive, we shall use this kanji to mean *baseball team* or simply *baseball.* The meaning, of course, is derived from the *nine* players who make up a team.

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10 **ten**

十

Turn this character 45° either way and you have the x used for the Roman numeral **ten**. [2]



* As a primitive, this character sometimes keeps its meaning of *ten* and sometimes signifies *needle,* this latter derived from the kanji for *needle* 針 (FRAME 292). Since the primitive is used in the kanji itself, there is no need to worry about confusing the two. In fact, we shall be following this procedure regularly.

---

11 **mouth**

口

Like several of the first characters we shall learn, the kanji for **mouth** is a clear pictograph. Since there are no circular shapes in the kanji, the square must be used to depict the circle. [3]



* As a primitive, this form also means *mouth.* Any of the range of possible images that the word suggests—an opening or entrance to a cave, a river, a bottle, or even the largest hole in your head—can be used for the primitive meaning.

---

12 **day**

日

This kanji is intended to be a pictograph of the sun. Recalling what we said in the previous frame about round forms, it is easy to detect the circle and the big smile that characterize our simplest drawings of the sun—like those yellow badges with the words, "Have a nice **day**!" [4]



* Used as a primitive, this kanji can mean *sun* or *day* or a *tongue wagging in the mouth.* This latter meaning, incidentally, derives from an old character outside the standard list meaning something like "sayeth" and written almost exactly the same, except that the stroke in the middle does not touch the right side (曰, FRAME 620).

---

13 月 **month**

This character is actually a picture of the moon, with the two horizontal lines representing the left eye and mouth of the mythical "man in the moon." (Actually, the Japanese see a hare in the moon, but it is a little farfetched to find one in the kanji.) And one **month**, of course, is one cycle of the moon. [4]



* As a primitive element, this character can take on the sense of *moon, flesh,* or *part of the body.* The reasons for the latter two meanings will be explained in a later chapter.

---

14 田 **rice field**

Another pictograph, this kanji looks like a bird's-eye view of a **rice field** divided into four plots. Be careful when writing this character to get the order of the strokes correct. You will find that it follows perfectly the principle stated in FRAME 4. [5]



* When used as a primitive element, the meaning of *rice field* is most common, but now and again it will take the meaning of *brains* from the fact that it looks a bit like that tangle of gray matter nestled under our skulls.

---

15 目 **eye**

Here again, if we round out the corners of this kanji and curve the middle strokes upwards and downwards respectively, we get something resembling an **eye**. [5]



* As a primitive, the kanji keeps its sense of *eye,* or to be more specific, an *eyeball.* When placed in the surroundings of a complex kanji, the primitive will sometimes be turned on its side like this: 罒.

Although only 9 of the 15 kanji treated in this lesson are formally listed as primitives—the elements that join together to make up other kanji—some of the others may also take on that function from time to time, only not with enough frequency to merit learning them as separate primitive elements and attaching special meanings to them. In other words, whenever one of the kanji already learned is used in another kanji, it will retain its key-word meaning unless we have assigned it a special primitive meaning.

Lesson 2

In this lesson we learn what a "primitive element" is by using the first 15 characters as pieces that can be fitted together to form new kanji—19 of them to be exact. Whenever the primitive meaning differs from the key-word meaning, you may want to go back to the original frame to refresh your memory. From now on, though, you should learn *both* the key word and the primitive meaning of new kanji as they appear. An Index of primitive elements has been added at the end of the book.

16 **old**

古

The primitive elements that compose this character are *ten* and *mouth,* but you may find it easier to remember it as a pictograph of a tombstone with a cross on top. Just think back to one of those graveyards you have visited, or better still, used to play in as a child, with **old** inscriptions on the tombstones.

This departure from the primitive elements in favor of a picto-

graph will take place now and again at these early stages, and almost never after that. So you need not worry about cluttering up your memory with too many character "drawings." [5]



* Used as a primitive element, this kanji keeps its key-word sense of *old,* but care should be taken to make that abstract notion as graphic as possible.

17 **I**

吾

There are a number of kanji for the word **I**, but the others tend to be more specific than this one. The key word here should be taken in the general psychological sense of the "perceiving subject." Now the one place in our bodies that all *five* senses are concentrated in is the head, which has no less than *five mouths*: 2 nostrils, 2 ears, and 1 mouth. Hence, *five mouths* = **I**. [7]



18 **risk**

冒

Remember when you were young and your mother told you never to look directly into the *sun* for fear you might burn out your *eyes*? Probably you were foolish enough to **risk** a quick glance once or twice; but just as probably, you passed that bit of folk wisdom on to someone else as you grew older. Here, too, the kanji that has a *sun* above and an *eye* right below looking up at it has the meaning of **risk** (see FRAME 12). [9]



19 **companion**

朋

The first **companion** that God made, as the Bible story goes, was Eve. Upon seeing her, Adam exclaimed, "*Flesh* of my *flesh!*" And that is precisely what this kanji says in so many strokes. [8]



20

明

bright

Among nature's **bright** lights, there are two that the biblical myth has God set in the sky: the *sun* to rule over the day and the *moon* to rule the night. Each of them has come to represent one of the common connotations of this key word: the *sun,* the **bright** insight of the clear thinker, and the *moon,* the **bright** intuition of the poet and the seer (see FRAME 13). [8]

日　明

21

唱

chant

This one is easy! You have one *mouth* making no noise (the choirmaster) and two *mouths with wagging tongues* (the minimum for a chorus). So think of the key word, **chant**, as monastery singing and the kanji is yours forever (see FRAME 11). [11]

口　口日　唱

22

晶

sparkle

What else can the word **sparkle** suggest if not a diamond? And if you've ever held a diamond up to the light, you will have noticed how every facet of it becomes like a miniature *sun.* This kanji is a picture of a tiny *sun* in three places (that is, "everywhere"), to give the sense of something that **sparkles** on all sides. Just like a diamond. In writing the primitive elements three times, note again how the rule for writing given in FRAME 4 holds true not only for the strokes in each individual element but also for the disposition of the elements in the character as a whole. [12]

日　昌　晶

23

品

goods

As in the character for *sparkle,* the triplication of a single element in this character indicates "everywhere" or "heaps of." When we think of **goods** in modern industrial society, we think of what has been mass-produced—that is to say, produced for

the "masses" of open *mouths* waiting like fledglings in a nest to "consume" whatever comes their way. [9]



24 呂

spine

This character is rather like a picture of two of the vertebrae in the **spine** linked by a single stroke. [7]



25 昌

prosperous

What we mentioned in the previous two frames about 3 of something meaning "everywhere" or "heaps of" was not meant to be taken lightly. In this kanji we see *two suns,* one atop the other, which, if we are not careful, is easily confused in memory with the *three suns* of *sparkle.* Focus on the number this way: since we speak of **prosperous** times as *sunny,* what could be more **prosperous** than a sky with *two suns* in it? Just be sure to actually SEE them there. [8]



26 早

early

This kanji is actually a picture of the first flower of the day, which we shall, in defiance of botanical science, call the *sun*-flower, since it begins with the element for *sun* and is held up on a stem with leaves (the pictographic representation of the final two strokes). This time, however, we shall ignore the pictograph and imagine *sun*flowers with *needles* for stems, which can be plucked and used to darn your socks.

The sense of **early** is easily remembered if one thinks of the *sun*flower as the **early** riser in the garden, because the *sun,* showing favoritism towards its namesake, shines on it before all the others (see FRAME 10). [6]



* As a primitive element, this kanji takes the meaning of *sunflower,* which was used to make the abstract key word *early* more graphic.

27

rising sun

旭

This character is a sort of nickname for the Japanese flag with its well-known emblem of the **rising sun**. If you can picture two seams running down that great red *sun,* and then imagine it sitting on a *baseball* bat for a flagpole, you have a slightly irreverent—but not altogether inaccurate—picture of how the sport has caught on in the Land of the **Rising Sun**. [6]

丿 九 九 旭 旭 旭

28

generation

世

We generally consider one **generation** as a period of thirty (or *ten* plus *ten* plus *ten*) years. If you look at this kanji in its completed form—not in its stroke order—you will see three *tens.* When writing it, think of the lower horizontal lines as "addition" lines written under numbers to add them up. Thus: *ten* "plus" *ten* "plus" *ten* = thirty. Actually, it's a lot easier doing it with a pencil than reading it in a book. [5]

一 十 卄 卄 世

29

stomach

胃

You will need to refer back to FRAMES 13 and 14 here for the special meaning of the two primitive elements that make up this character: *flesh (part of the body)* and *brain.* What the kanji says, if you look at it, is that the *part of the body* that keeps the *brain* in working order is the **stomach**. To keep the elements in proper order, when you write this kanji think of the *brain* as being "held up" by the *flesh.* [9]

田 胃

30

旦

nightbreak

While we normally refer to the start of the day as "daybreak," Japanese commonly refers to it as the "opening up of night" into day. Hence the choice of this rather odd key word, **nightbreak**. The single stroke at the bottom represents the *floor* (have a peek again at FRAME 1) or the horizon over which the *sun* is poking its head. [5]

日 旦

31

胆

gall bladder

The pieces in this character should be easily recognizable: on the left, the element for *part of the body,* and on the right, the character for *nightbreak,* which we have just met. What all of this has to do with the **gall bladder** is not immediately clear. But all we need to do is give a slight twist to the traditional biblical advice about not letting the sun set on your anger (which ancient medicine associated with the choler or bile that the **gall bladder** is supposed to filter out), and change it to "not letting the *night break* on your anger" (or your **gall**)—and the work of remembering the kanji is done. And the improvement is not a bad piece of advice in its own right, since anger, like so many other things, can often be calmed by letting the sun set on it and then "sleeping it off." [9]

月 胆

32

亘

span

"Sunrise, sunset, sunrise, sunset…" goes the song of the Fiddler on the Roof. You can almost see the journey of the *sun* as it moves from one horizon (the *floor*) to its noonday heights in the sky overhead *(ceiling)* and then disappears over the other horizon—day after day, marking the **span** of our lives. [6]

一 日 亘

We end this lesson with two final pictographic characters that happen to be among the easiest to recognize for their form, but among the most difficult to write. We introduce them here to run an early test on whether or not you have been paying close attention to the stroke order of the kanji you have been learning.

33 **concave**

凹

You couldn't have asked for a better key word for this kanji! Just have a look at it: a perfect image of a **concave** lens (remembering, of course, that the kanji square off rounded things), complete with its own little "cave." Now all you have to do is learn how to write it. [5]



34 **convex**

凸

Maybe this helps you see how the Japanese have no trouble keeping **convex** distinct from *concave.* Note the odd feeling of the third stroke. If it doesn't feel all that strange now, by the time you are done with this book, it will. There are very few times you will have to write it. [5]



Lesson 3

AFTER LESSON 2, you should now have some idea of how an apparently complex and difficult kanji can be broken down into simple elements that make remembering it a great deal easier. After completing this lesson you should have a clearer idea of how the course is laid out. We merely add a couple of primitive elements to the kanji we already know and see how many new kanji we can form—in this case, 20 in all—and when we run out, add more primitives. And so on, until there are no kanji left.

In LESSON 3 you will also be introduced to primitive elements that are not themselves kanji but only used to construct other kanji. These are marked with a star [*] instead of a number. There is no need to make a special effort to memorize them. The sheer frequency with which most of them show up should make remembering them automatic.

*

walking stick

丨

This primitive element is a picture of just what it looks like: a cane or **walking stick**. It carries with it the connotations of lameness and whatever else one associates with the use of a cane. Rarely—but very rarely—it will be laid on its side. Whenever this occurs, it will ALWAYS be driven through the middle of some other primitive element. In this way, you need not worry about confusing it with the primitive meanings of *one.* [1]

丨

*

a drop of

丶

The meaning of this primitive is obvious from the first moment you look at it, though just what it will be **a drop of** will differ from case to case. The important thing is not to think of it as something insignificant like a "drop in the bucket" but as something so important that it can change the whole picture—like **a drop of** arsenic in your mother-in-law's coffee. [1]

丶 ㇀

* In general, it is written from right to left, but there are times when it can be slanted left to right. At other times it can be stretched out a bit. (In cases where you have trouble remembering this, it may help to think of it as an *eyedropper* dripping drops of something or other.) Examples will follow in this lesson.

35

olden times

旧

A *walking stick* is needed for *days* of **olden times**, since *days*, too, get old—at least insofar as we refer to them as the "good old

days." The main thing here is to think of "good old days" when you hear the key word **olden times**. The rest will take care of itself. [5]

丨 旧

36

oneself

自

You can think of this kanji as a stylized pictograph of the nose, that little *drop* that Mother Nature set between your *eyes*. The Japanese refer to themselves by pointing a finger at their nose—giving us an easy way to remember the kanji for **oneself**. [6]

丿 丨丿 𠂊 白 自 自

* The same meaning of *oneself* can be kept when this kanji is used as a primitive element, but you will generally find it better to give it the meaning of *nose* or *nostrils,* both because it accords with the story above and because it is the first part of the kanji for *nose* (FRAME 733).

37

white

白

The color **white** is a mixture of all the primary colors, both for pigments and for light, as we see when a prism breaks up the rays of the *sun*. Hence, a single *drop* of *sun* spells **white**. [5]

丿 丨丿 𠂊 白 白

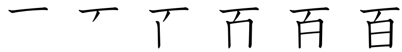
* As a primitive, this character can either retain its meaning of *white* or take the more graphic meaning of a *white bird* or *dove.* This latter stems from the fact that it appears at the top of the kanji for *bird,* which we shall get to later (FRAME 2091).

38

hundred

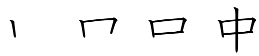
百

The Japanese refer to a person's 99th birthday as a "*white* year" because *white* is the kanji you are left with if you subtract *one* from a **hundred**. [6]



39 中 **in**

The elements here are a *walking stick* and a *mouth*. Remember the trouble your mother had getting medicine **in** your *mouth*? Chances are it crossed her mind more than once to grab something handy, like your grandfather's *walking stick*, to pry open your jaws while she performed her duty. Keep the image of getting something **in** from the outside, and the otherwise abstract sense of this key word should be a lot easier than trying to spoon castor oil **in**to a baby's mouth. [4]



40 千 **thousand**

This kanji is almost too simple to pull apart, but for the sake of practice, have a look at the *eyedropper* above and the *ten* below. Now put the elements together by thinking of squeezing two more zeros out of an *eyedropper* alongside the number *ten* to make it a **thousand**. [3]



41 舌 **tongue**

The primitive for *mouth* and the character for *thousand* naturally form the idea of **tongue** if one thinks of a *thousand mouths* able to speak the same language, or as we say, "sharing a common **tongue**." It is easy to see the connection between the idiom and the kanji if you take its image literally: a single **tongue** being passed around from *mouth* to *mouth*. [6]

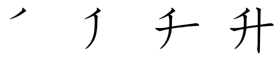


42 升 **measuring box**

This is the character for the little wooden box that the Japanese use for measuring things, as well as for drinking saké out of.

Simply imagine the outside as spiked with a *thousand* sharp *needles*, and the quaint little **measuring box** becomes a drinker's nightmare!

Be very careful when you write this character not to confuse it with the writing of *thousand*. The reason for the difference gives us a chance to clarify another general principle of writing that supersedes the one we mentioned in FRAME 4: WHEN A SINGLE STROKE RUNS VERTICALLY THROUGH THE MIDDLE OF A CHARACTER, IT IS WRITTEN LAST. [4]



43

rise up

昇

Our image here is made up of two primitive elements: a *sun* and a *measuring box*. Just as the *sun* can be seen **rising up** in the morning from—where else—the Land of the Rising Sun, this kanji has the *sun* **rising up** out of a Japanese *measuring box*—the "*measuring box* of the **rising-up** *sun*." [8]



44

round

丸

We speak of "**round** numbers," or "**rounding** a number off," meaning to add an insignificant amount to bring it to the nearest 10. For instance, if you add just a wee bit, the tiniest *drop,* to *nine,* you end up with a **round** number. [3]



* As a primitive, this element takes the meaning of a *fat man.* Think of a grotesquely *fat man* whose paunch so covers the plate that he is always getting hit by the pitch. Hence a *round baseball player* becomes a *fat man.*

45

measurement

寸

This kanji actually stood for a small **measurement** used prior to the metric system, a bit over an inch in length, and from there acquired the sense of **measurement**. In the old system, it was

one-*tenth* of a *shaku* (whose kanji we shall meet in FRAME 1151). The picture, appropriately, represents one *drop* of a *ten* (with a hook!). [3]

一 十 寸

* As a primitive, we shall use this to mean *glue* or *glued to*. There is no need to devise a story to remember this, since the primitive will appear so often you would have to struggle hard NOT to remember it.

---

46 肘

elbow

Instead of the familiar "grease" we usually associate with the **elbow** of someone hard at work, the kanji gives us a *part of the body* that has been *glued to* its task. [7]

月 肘

---

47 專

specialty

Ten . . . rice fields . . . glue. That is how one would read the primitive elements of this kanji from top to bottom. Now if we make a simple sentence out of these elements, we get: "*Ten rice fields glued* together."

A **specialty**, of course, refers to one's special *"field"* of endeavor or competence. In fact, few people remain content with a single **specialty** and usually extend themselves in other *fields* as well. This is how we come to get the picture of *ten fields glued* together to represent a **specialty**. [9]



---

48 博

Dr.

At the left we have the *needle;* at the right, the kanji for *specialty*, plus an extra *drop* at the top. Think of a **Dr.** who is a *specialist* with a *needle* (an acupuncturist) and let the *drop* at the top represent the period at the end of **Dr.**

In principle we are trying to avoid this kind of device, which plays on abstract grammatical conventions; but I think you will

agree, after you have had occasion to use the right side of this kanji in forming other kanji, that the exception is merited in this case. [12]



* The primitive form of this kanji eliminates the *needle* on the left and gets the meaning of an *acupuncturist*.

We have already seen one example of how to form primitives from other primitives, when we formed the *nightbreak* out of *sun* and *floor* (FRAME 30). Let us take two more examples of this procedure right away, so that we can do so from now on without having to draw any particular attention to the fact.

*

卜

divining rod

This is a picture of a **divining rod**, composed of *a drop* and a *walking stick*, but easy enough to remember as a pictograph. Alternately, you can think of it as a **magic wand**. In either case, it should suggest images of magic or fortune-telling.

Nowadays it is written in the stroke order given here when it appears as a primitive, but until recently the order was often reversed (in order to instill correct habits for more stylized calligraphy). [2]

丨 卜

* Although it falls outside of the list of general-use kanji, this element is actually a kanji in its own right, having virtually the same meaning as the kanji in the next frame.

49

占

fortune-telling

This is one of those kanji that is a real joy of simplicity: a *divining rod* with a *mouth*—which translate directly into **fortune-telling**.

Note how the movement from top to bottom (the movement in which the kanji are written) is also the order of the elements which make up our story and of the key word itself: first *divining rod,* then *mouth*. This will not always be possible, but where it is, memory has almost no work at all to do. [5]



50

above

上

The two directions, **above** and below, are usually pointed at with the finger. But the characters do not follow that custom, so we have to choose something else, easily remembered. The primitives show a *magic wand* standing *above* a *floor*—"magically," you might say. Anyway, go right on to the next frame, since the two belong together and are best remembered as a unit, just as the words **above** and *below* suggest each other. [3]



51

below

下

Here we see our famous miraculous *magic wand* hanging, all on its own, **below** the *ceiling*, as you probably already guessed would happen. In addition to giving us two new kanji, the two shapes given in this and the preceding frame also serve to fix the use of the primitives for *ceiling* and *floor*, by drawing our attention successively to the line standing above and **below** the primitive element to which it is related. [3]



52

eminent

卓

The word **eminent** suggests a famous or well-known person. So all you need to do—given the primitives of a *magic wand* and a *sunflower*—is to think of the world's most **eminent** magician as one who uses a *sunflower* for a *magic wand* (like a flower-child who goes around turning the world into peace and love). [8]

丨 ⺊ ⺊ 占 占 卓 卓 卓

*

𠦝

mist

Here is our second example of a primitive composed of other primitives but not itself a kanji. At the bottom is the primitive (also a kanji) for *early* or *sunflower*. At the top, a *needle*. Conveniently, **mist** falls *early* in the morning, like little *needles* of rain, to assure that the *sunflower* blooms *early* as we have learned it should. [8]

一 十 十 古 古 吉 直 𠦝

53

朝

morning

On the right we see the *moon* fading off into the first light of **morning**, and to the left, the *mist* that falls to give nature a shower to prepare it for the coming heat. If you can think of the *moon* tilting over to spill *mist* on your garden, you should have no trouble remembering which of all the elements in this story are to serve as primitives for constructing the character. [12]

𠦝 朝

54

嘲

derision

The bad feeling created by words spoken in **derision** often leaves a bad taste in the *mouth* of the one who speaks them, kind of like the foul aftertaste that follows a night before of too much of the wrong stuff—or what we call *morning mouth.* [15]

口 嘲

Lesson 4

At the risk of going a little bit too fast, we are now going to introduce five new primitive elements, all of which are very easy to remember, either because of their frequency or because of their shape. But remember: there is no reason to study the primitives by themselves. They are being presented systematically to make their learning automatic.

*

animal legs

ハ

Like the four that follow it, this primitive is not a kanji in its own right, though it is said to be derived from 八, the character we learned earlier for *eight*. It always comes at the bottom of the primitive to which it is related. It can mean the **legs** of any kind of **animal**: from a grizzly bear's paws to an octopus's tentacles to the spindle shanks of a spider. (The one animal not allowed is our friend homo sapiens, whose legs figure in the next frame.) Even where the term "legs" will apply metaphorically to the legs of pieces of furniture, it is best to keep the association with **animal legs**. (You may review frame 6 here.) [2]

ノ ハ

*

human legs

儿

Notice how these **human legs** are somewhat shapelier and more highly evolved than those of the so-called "lower animals." The one on the left, drawn first, is straight; while the one on the right bends gracefully and ends with a hook. Though they are not likely to suggest the **legs** of any **human** you know, they do have something of the look of someone out for a stroll, especially if you compare them to *animal legs*.

If you had any trouble with the kanji for the number *four*, now would be the time to return to it (frame 4). [2]

丿 儿

*

几

wind

This primitive gets its name from the full kanji for the **wind** (FRAME 563). It is called an "enclosure" because other elements are often drawn in the middle of it, though it can also be compressed together so that there is no room for anything in it. The main thing to remember when writing this element is that the second stroke bends OUTWARDS, like a gust of **wind** blown from above. In addition to the basic meaning of **wind**, we shall also have occasion to use the image of a **weather vane**. The derivation is obvious. [2]

丿 几

*

勹

bound up

Like *wind*, the element meaning **bound up** is also an enclosure that can wrap itself around other elements or be compressed when there is nothing to enclose. When this latter happens—usually because there is not enough room—and it is set on top, the little hook at the end is dropped off, like this: 𠂉.

The sense of **bound up** is that of being "tied and gagged" or wrapped up tightly. If you have trouble remembering when it serves as an enclosure (with the hook) and when not (without the hook), you might think of the former as a **chain** and the latter as a **rope**. [2]

丿 勹

*

丷

horns

This primitive element ALWAYS appears at the top of the element to which it is related, and is always attached, or almost attached, to the first horizontal line to come under it. The **horns** can never simply be left hanging in the air. When there is no line available, an extra horizontal stroke (like a *one*) is added. The final kanji of this lesson gives an example.

The meaning of this element is wide enough to embrace the **horns** of bulls, rams, billy goats, and moose, but not the family of musical instruments. As with other elements with such

"open" meanings, it is best to settle on one that you find most vivid and stick with that image consistently. [2]

---

55 **只** — **only**

When we run across abstract key words like this one, the best way to get an image it to recall some common but suggestive phrase in which the word appears. For instance, we can think of the expression "it's the **only** one of its kind." Then we imagine a barker at a side-show advertising some strange pac-man like creature he has inside his tent, with only a gigantic *mouth* and two wee *animal legs*. [5]



---

56 **貝** — **shellfish**

To remember the primitive elements that make up this kanji, an *eye* and *animal legs,* you might be tempted to think of it as a pictograph of a **shellfish** with its ridged shell at the top and two little *legs* sticking out of the bottom. But that might not help you recall later just how many ridges to put on the shell. Better to imagine a freakish **shellfish** with a single, gigantic *eye* roaming the beaches on its slender little *legs,* scaring the wits out of the sunbathers. [7]



* When used as a primitive, in addition to *shells,* the meanings *oyster* and *clam* will often come in handy.

---

57 **唄** — **pop song**

There is a lot of money to be made if one's **songs** are "**pop**ular." This is depicted here as a stream of *clams* spewing out of the *mouth* of someone performing a **pop song**. [10]



58 貞 **upright**

Now take the last primitive, the *shellfish,* and set a *magic wand* over it, and you have the kanji for **upright**. After all, the *clam* and the *oyster* are incapable of walking **upright**. It would take a magician with his *wand* to pull off such a feat—which is precisely what we have in this kanji. [9]

⺊ 貞

59 員 **employee**

How do we get a *mouth* over a *shellfish* to mean an **employee**? Simple. Just remember the advice new **employees** get about keeping their *mouths* shut and doing their job, and then make that more graphic by picturing an office building full of white-collar workers scurrying around with *clams* pinched to their *mouths.* [10]

口 員

60 貼 **post a bill**

The key word in this frame has do with **posting bills** to a billboard. In this case, the billboard is standing at the exit to a Chinese restaurant displaying the latest alternative to the traditional *fortune-telling* cookies. Look closely and you will see rows of leftover shells of *clams* with little slips of paper sticking out of them **posted** to the billboard.[12]

貝 貼

61 見 **see**

The elements that compose the character for **see** are the *eye* firmly fixed to a pair of *human legs*. Surely, somewhere in your experience, there is a vivid image just waiting to be dragged up to help you remember this character…. [7]

丨 冂 月 月 目 貝 見

62

newborn babe

児

The top part of the kanji in this frame, you will remember, is the character for *olden times*, those *days* so old they needed a *walking stick* to get around. Western mythical imagination has old "Father Time" leaning on his sickle with a **newborn babe** crawling around his *legs*, the idea being that the circle of birth-and-death goes on.

This is the first of three times that the kanji for *olden times* will appear in this book as a primitive element in another kanji, so try to make the most of it. [7]

丨 旧 㫐 児

63

beginning

元

"In the **beginning**…" starts that marvelous shelf of books we call the Bible. It talks about how all things were made, and tells us that when the Creator came to humanity she made *two* of them, man and woman. While we presume she made *two* of every other animal as well, we are not told as much. Hence we need only *two* and a pair of *human legs* come to the kanji that means **beginning**. [4]

一 二 テ 元

64

page

頁

What we have to do here is turn a *shellfish* into a **page** of a book. The *one* at the top tells us that we only get a rather short book, in fact a book of only *one* **page**. Imagine a title printed on the shell of an *oyster,* let us say "Pearl of Wisdom," and then open the quaint book to its *one* and only **page**, on which you find a single, radiant *drop of* wisdom, one of the masterpiece poems of nature. [9]

一 丆 丆 丙 百 百 首 頁 頁

* As a primitive, this kanji takes the unrelated meaning of a *head* (preferably one detached from its body), derived from the character for *head* (FRAME 1549).

65 頑

stubborn

This character refers to the block*headed,* persistent **stubbornness** of one who sticks to an idea or a plan just the way it was at the *beginning*, without letting anything that comes up along the way alter things in the least. The explanation makes "sense," but is hard to remember because the word *"beginning"* is too abstract. Back up to the image we used two frames ago—Adam and Eve in their Eden—and try again: The root of all **stubbornness** goes back to the *beginning*, with two brothers each **stubbornly** defending his own way of life and asking their God to bless it favorably. Abel stuck to agriculture, Cain to animal-raising. Picture these two with their giant, swelled *heads*, each vying for the favors of heaven, a **stubborn** grimace on their faces. No wonder something unfortunate happened! [13]

元 頑

66 凡

mediocre

While we refer to something insignificant as a "*drop* in the bucket," the kanji for **mediocre** suggests the image of a "*drop* in the *wind*." [3]

丿 几 凡

67 負

defeat

Above we have the condensed form of *bound up*, and below the familiar *shellfish*. Now imagine two *oysters* engaged in *shell*-to-*shell* combat, the one who is **defeated** being *bound and gagged* with seaweed, the victor towering triumphantly over it. The *bound shellfish* thus becomes the symbol for **defeat**. [9]

⺈ 負

68 万

ten thousand

Japanese counts higher numbers in units of **ten thousand**, unlike the West, which advances according to units of one thousand. (Thus, for instance, 40,000 would be read "four **ten-thousands**"

by a Japanese.) Given that the comma is used in larger numbers to *bind up* a numerical unit of one thousand, the elements for *one* and *bound up* naturally come to form **ten thousand**.

The order of strokes here needs special attention, both because it falls outside the general principles we have learned already, and because it involves writing the element for *bound up* in an order opposite to the one we learned. If it is any consolation, this happens every time these three strokes come together. [3]

一 丂 万

69

句

phrase

By combining the two primitives *bound up* and *mouth*, it is easy to see how this character can get the meaning of a **phrase**. After all, a **phrase** is nothing more than a number of words *bound up* tightly and neatly so that they will fit in your *mouth*. [5]

丿 勹 勹 句 句

70

肌

texture

Ever notice how the **texture** of your face and hands is affected by the *wind*? A day's skiing or sailing makes them rough and dry, and in need of a good soft cream to soothe the burn. So whenever a *part of the body* gets exposed to the *wind*, its **texture** is affected. (If it is any help, the Latin word hiding inside **texture** connotes how something is "to the touch.") [6]

月 肌

71

旬

decameron

There simply is not a good phrase in English for the block of ten days which this character represents. So we resurrect the classical phrase, **decameron**, whose connotations the tales of Boccaccio have done much to enrich. Actually, it refers to a journey of ten *days* taken by a band of people—that is, a group of people *bound together* for the *days* of the **decameron**. [6]

勹 旬

72 **ladle**

勺

If you want to *bind up drops* of anything—water, soup, lemonade—you use something to scoop these *drops* up, which is what we call a **ladle**. See the last *drop* left inside the **ladle**? [3]

勹 勺

73 **bull's eye**

的

The elements *white bird* and *ladle* easily suggest the image of a **bull's eye** if you imagine a rusty old *ladle* with a **bull's eye** painted on it in the form of a tiny *white bird*, who lets out a little "peep" every time you hit the target. [8]

白 的

74 **neck**

首

Reading this kanji from the top down, we have: *horns . . . nose*. Together they bring to mind the picture of a moose-head hanging on the den wall, with its great *horns* and long *nose*. Now while we would speak of cutting off a moose's "head" to hang on the wall, the Japanese speak of cutting off its **neck**. It's all a matter of how you look at it. Anyway, if you let the word **neck** conjure up the image of a moose with a very l-o-n-g **neck** hanging over the fireplace, whose *horns* you use for a coat-rack and whose *nose* has spigots left and right for scotch and water, you should have no trouble with the character.

Here we get a good look at what we mentioned when we first introduced the element for *horns*: that they can never be left floating free and require an extra horizontal stroke to prevent that from happening, as is the case here. [9]

丶 丷 䒑 䒑 产 首 首 首 首

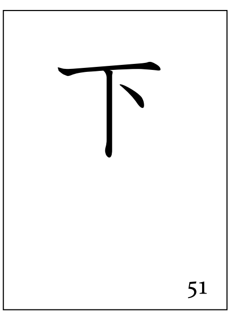
Lesson 5

That is about all we can do with the pieces we have accumulated so far, but as we add each new primitive element to those we already know, the number of kanji we will be able to form will increase by leaps and bounds.

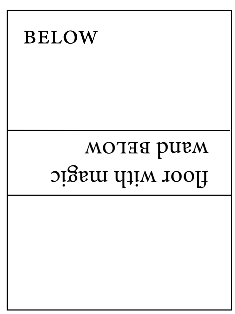
If we were to step outside of the standard list, we would see that there are still a handful of more characters we could make with the pieces at hand, though none of them is very useful

While many of the stories you have learned in the previous lessons are actually more complex than the majority you will learn in the later chapters, they are the *first* stories you have learned, and for that reason are not likely to cause you much difficulty. By now, however, you may be wondering just how to go about reviewing what you have learned. Obviously it won't do simply to flip through the pages you have already studied, because the order already gives them away. The best method is to design for yourself a set of flash cards that you can add to as you go through the book.

If you have not already started doing this on your own, you might try it this way: Buy heavy paper (about twice the thickness of normal index cards), unlined and with a semigloss finish. Cut it into cards of about 9 cm. long and 6 cm. wide. On one side, make a large ball-pen drawing of one kanji in the top two-thirds of the card. (Writing done with fountain pens and felt-tip pens tends to smear with the sweat that comes from holding them in your hands for a long time.) On the bottom right-hand corner, put the number of the frame in which the kanji appeared. On the back side, in the upper left-hand corner, write the key-word meaning of the character. Then draw a line across the middle of the card and another line about 2 cm. below it. The space between these two lines can be used for any notes you may need later to remind you of the primitive elements or stories you used to remember the character. *Only fill this in when you need to, but make a card for every kanji* as soon as you have learned it.



The rest of the space on the card you will need later; when you study the readings of the characters, you might use the space above the double lines. The bottom half of the card, on both sides, can be left free for inserting kanji compounds (front side) and their readings and meanings (back side).



A final note about reviewing. You have probably gotten yourself into the habit of writing the character several times when memorizing it, whether you need to or not; and then writing it MORE times for kanji that you have trouble remembering. There is really no need to write the kanji more than once, unless you have trouble with the stroke order and want to get a better "feel" for it. If a kanji causes you trouble, spend time clarifying the imagery of its story. Simply rewriting the character will reinforce any latent suspicions you still have that the "tried and true method" of learning by repeating is the only reliable one—the very bias we are trying to uproot. Also, when you review, REVIEW ONLY FROM THE KEY WORD TO THE KANJI, NOT THE OTHER WAY AROUND. The reasons for this, along with further notes on reviewing, will come later.

We are now ready to return to work, adding a few new primitives one by one, and seeing what new characters they allow us to form. We shall cover 24 new kanji in this lesson.

75 **fish guts**

乙

The kanji shown here actually represents the "second" position in the old Chinese zodiac, which the Japanese still use as an alternate way of enumeration, much the same way that English will revert to Roman numerals. Among its many other meanings are "pure," "tasteful," "quaint," and—get this!—**fish guts**. Since it is a pictograph of a fishhook, it should not be hard to associate it with the key word. [1]

乙

* We will take *fishhook* and *hook* as primitive meanings. The shape will rarely be quite the same as that of the kanji. When it appears at the bottom of another primitive, it is straightened out, almost as if the weight of the upper element had bent it out of shape: ⺃. And when it appears to the right of another element, the short horizontal line that gets the shape started is omitted and it is stretched out and narrowed, all for reasons of space and aesthetics: 乚. Examples follow.

76 **riot**

乱

In a **riot**, manners are laid aside and tempers get short, even in so courtesy-conscious a land as Japan. This kanji shows what

happens to a **rioting** *tongue*: it gets "barbed" like a *fishhook*, and sets to attacking the opposition, to *hook* them as it were. [7]

舌 乱

77

直

straightaway

Begin with the top two primitives, *needle* and *eye*. Together they represent the *eye of a needle*. Below them is a *fishhook* that has been **straightened out** and its barb removed so that it can pass through the *eye of the needle*. [8]

一 十 𠂇 冇 有 肓 首 直

*

丌

tool

Although this primitive is not very common, it is useful to know, as the following examples will show. Conveniently, it is always drawn at the very bottom of any kanji in which it figures. The first stroke, the horizontal one, is detached from anything above it, but is necessary to distinguish **tool** from *animal legs*. The sense of the element is a carpenter's **tool**, which comes from its pictographic representation of a small table with legs (make them *animal legs* if you need a more graphic image), so that any element lying on top of it will come to be viewed as a **tool** in the hands of a carpenter. [3]

一 丆 丌

78

具

tool

Here is the full kanji on which the last frame is based. If you can think of a table full of carpenter's **tools** of all sorts, each equipped with its own *eye* so that it can keep a watch over what you are doing with it, you won't have trouble later keeping the primitive and the kanji apart. [8]

目 旦 具 具

79 **true**

真

Here again we meet the composite element, *eye of the needle,* which here combines with *tool* to give us a measure of what is **true** and what is not. [10]

一 十 直 真

---

* **by one's side**

ナ

This primitive has the look of *ten*, except that the left stroke is bent down toward the left. It indicates where your hands (your *ten* fingers) fall when you let them droop: **by your side**.

The stroke order of this character can be reversed; but whichever stroke is written second, that stroke should be drawn longer than the other. The difference is slight, and all but unnoticeable in printed characters, but it should be learned all the same. [2]

一 ナ • ノ ナ

---

80 **craft**

工

The pictograph of an I beam, like the kind that is used in heavy construction work on buildings and bridges, gives us the character for **craft** in general. [3]

一 丅 工

* As a primitive element, the key word retains the meaning of *craft* and also takes on the related meanings of *I beam* and *artificial.*

---

81 **left**

左

By combining the primitive and the kanji of the last two frames and reading the results, we get: *by one's side . . . craft*. Conveniently, the **left** has traditionally been considered the "sinister" *side*, where dark and occult *crafts* are cultivated. Note how the second stroke droops over to the **left** and is longer than the first. [5]

一 ナ 𠂇 左 左

82 右 **right**

When thinking of the key word **right**, in order to avoid confusion with the previous frame, take advantage of the double-meaning here, too. Imagine a little *mouth* hanging down by your *side*—like a little voice of conscience—telling you the **right** thing to do. Here the second stroke should reach out to the **right** and be drawn slightly longer than the first. [5]

ノ ナ 𠂇 右 右

83 有 **possess**

The picture here is of someone with a slab of *flesh* dangling *by the side*, perhaps from a belt or rope tied around the waist. Think of it as an evil spirit in **possession** of one's soul, who can be exorcized only by allowing fresh *flesh* to hang *by one's side* until it begins to putrefy and stink so bad that the demon departs. Take careful note of the stroke order. [6]

ノ ナ 𠂇 有 有 有

84 賄 **bribe**

To the left we have the primitive for a *shellfish*, and to the right the kanji we just learned for *possess*. Keep the connotation of the last frame for the word *possess*, and now expand your image of *shells* to include the ancient value they had as money (a usage that will come in very helpful later on). Now one who is *possessed* by *shells* is likely to abandon any higher principles to acquire more and more wealth. These are the easiest ones to **bribe** with a few extra *shells*. [13]

貝 賄

85

貢

tribute

A **tribute** has a kind of double-meaning in English: honor paid freely and *money* collected by coercion. Simply because a ruler bestows a noble name on a deed is hardly any consolation to the masses who must part with their hard-earned *money*. Little wonder that this ancient *craft* of getting *money* by calling it a **tribute** has given way to a name closer to how it feels to those who pay it: a tax. [10]

工 貢

86

項

paragraph

To the right we see a *head* and to the left an element that means *craft*. When we think of a **paragraph**, we immediately think of a *heading* device to break a text into parts. (Think of the elaborate *heads* often seen at the start of medieval manuscripts and the task becomes easier still.) Just where and how to do it belongs to the writer's *craft*. Hence, we define **paragraphing** as the "*heading craft*" to remember this character. [12]

工 項

87

刀

sword

Although this kanji no longer looks very much like a **sword**, it does have some resemblance to the handle of the **sword**. This is to our advantage, in that it helps us make a distinction between two primitive elements based on this kanji. [2]

㇆ 刀

* In the form of the kanji, this primitive means a *dagger*. When it appears to the right of another element, it is commonly stretched out like this 刂 and takes the sense of a great and flashing *saber*, a meaning it gets from a character we shall learn later (FRAME 1801).

88

刃

blade

Think of using a *dagger* as a razor **blade**, and it shouldn't be hard to imagine cutting yourself. See the little *drop of* blood clinging to the **blade**? [3]

フ 刀 刃

89

切

cut

To the right we see the *dagger* and next to it the number *seven* whose primitive meaning we decided would be *diced* (FRAME 7). It is hard to think of **cutting** anything with a knife without imagining one of those skillful Japanese chefs. Only let us say that he has had too much to drink at a party, grabs a *dagger* lying on the mantelpiece and starts *dicing* up everything in sight, starting with the hors d'oeuvres and going on to the furniture and the carpets…. [4]

一 七 七フ 切

90

召

seduce

A *sword* or *dagger* posed over a *mouth* is how the character for "beckoning" is written. The related but less tame key word **seduce** was chosen because it seemed to fit better with the—how shall we put it?—Freudian implications of the kanji. (Observe if you will that it is not sure whether the long slender object is **seducing** the small round one or vice versa.) [5]

刀 召

* The primitive meaning remains the same: *seduce*. Just be sure to associate it with a very concrete image.

91

昭

shining

Let the key word suggest **shining** one's shoes, the purpose of which is to *seduce* the *sun* down on them for all to see. [9]

日 昭

92 **rule**

則

The character depicts a *clam* alongside a great and flashing *saber*. Think of digging for *clams* in an area where there are gaming **rules** governing how large a find has to be before you can keep it. So you take your trusty *saber*, which you have carefully notched like a yardstick, crack open a *clam*, and then measure the poor little beastie to see if it is as long as the **rules** say it has to be. [9]

貝 則

---

* **wealth**

畐

To prepare for following frame, we introduce here a somewhat rare primitive meaning **wealth**. It takes its meaning from the common image of the over**wealthy** as also being overfed. More specifically, the kanji shows us *one* single *mouth* devouring all the harvest of the *fields*, presumably while those who labor in them go hungry. Think of the phrase exactly as it is written when you draw the character, and the disposition of the elements is easy. [9]

一 the 畐

---

93 **vice-**

副

The key word **vice** has the sense of someone second-in-command. The great and flashing *saber* to the right (its usual location, so you need not worry about where to put it from now on) and the *wealth* on the left combine to create an image of dividing one's property to give a share to one's **vice**-*wealth*-holder. [11]

畐 畐| 副

---

94 **separate**

別

In the Old East, the samurai and his *saber* were never **separated**. They were constant companions, like the cowboy of the Old West and his six-shooter. This character depicts what must

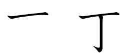
have been the height of **separation**-anxiety for a samurai: to be *bound up with a rope* and unable to get at his *saber* leaning only a few feet away from him. Look at that *mouth* bellowing out for shame and sorrow!

Note the order in which the element for *tied up* is written—just as it had been with the character for *ten thousand*. [7]



95 丁 **street**

The picture here is of a **street** sign on a long pole: Hollywood and Vine, if you please, or any *street* that immediately conjures up the image of a **street** sign to you. [2]



* Used as a primitive, we change the meaning of the key word and take the shape to signify a *nail* or a *spike*. Should it happen, on reviewing, that you find the pictographs get jumbled, then think of jerking a *street* sign out of the ground and using it as a *nail* to repair your garage roof.

96 町 **village**

Street signs standing at the corner of the *rice fields* depict the **village** limits. (Remember what was said earlier: when used as a primitive, a kanji may either take its primitive meaning or revert to the original meaning of its key word.) [7]



97 可 **can**

Remember the story about the "Little Engine that **Could**" when you hear this key word, and the rest is simple. See the determined little locomotive huffing and puffing up the mountain—"I think I **can**, I think I **can**..."—spitting railroad *spikes* out of its *mouth* as it chews up the line to the top. [5]



98 **place on the head**

頂

The key word is actually a formal metaphor meaning "humble acceptance." Reading off the two primitive elements in the order of their writing, we have: *nail . . . head*. As in "hitting the *nail* on the *head*." Now one presumes that most people can handle metaphors, but if you were to run into a dimwit working in a hardware store who only knew the literal meaning of things, and were to ask him, in your best Japanese, to **place on your head** a nail, he might miss the point and cause you considerable torment. [11]

丁 頂

Lesson 6

The last group of primitives took us pretty far, and probably forced you to pay more attention to the workings of imagination. In this lesson we shall concentrate on primitives that have to do with people.

As you were reminded in frame 80, even those kanji that are given special meanings as primitives may also retain their key word meaning when used as primitives. Although this may sound confusing, in fact it turns out to be convenient for making stories and, in addition, helps to reinforce the original meaning of the character.

99 **child**

子

This kanji is a pictograph of a **child** wrapped up in one of those handy cocoons that Japanese mothers fix to their backs to carry around young **children** who cannot get around by themselves. The first stroke is like a wee head popping out for air; the second shows the body and legs all wrapped up; and the final stroke shows the arms sticking out to cling to the mother's neck. [3]

㇇ 了 子

* As a primitive, the meaning of *child* is retained, though you might imagine a little older *child,* able to run around and get into more mischief.

100

cavity

孔

Probably the one thing most *children* fear more than anything else is the dentist's chair. Once a *child* has seen a dentist holding the x-rays up to the light and heard that ominous word **cavity**, even though it is not likely to know that the word means "hole" until it is much older, it will not be long before those two syllables get associated with the drill and that row of shiny *hooks* the dentist uses to torture people who are too small to fight back. [4]

㇇ 了 孑 孔

101

complete

了

Learn this character by returning to FRAME 99 and the image given there. The only difference is that the "arms" have been left off (actually, only tucked inside). Thus a *child* with its arms wrapped up into the back-sack is the picture of a job successfully **completed**. [2]

㇇ 了

102

woman

女

You have probably seen somewhere the form of a squatting **woman** drawn behind this character, with two legs at the bottom, two arms (the horizontal line) and the head poking out the top. A little farfetched, until you draw the character and feel the grace and flow of the three simple strokes. Remembering the kanji is easy; being able to write it beautifully is another thing. [3]

𡿨 𡚨 女

* The primitive meaning is the same: *woman*.

103 **fond**

好

The phrase "to be **fond** of someone" has a natural gentleness about it, and lends a tenderness to the sense of touching by giving us the related term "to **fondle**." The character likens it to a *woman* **fondling** her *child*. [6]

女 好

104 **likeness**

如

Pardon me if I revert to the venerable old Dr. Freud again, but his eye for symbolism is often helpful to appreciate things that more earthy imaginations once accepted more freely but that we have learned to cover over with a veneer of etiquette. For instance, the fact that things like the *mouth* of a cave served as natural ritual substitutes for the opening through which a *woman* gives birth. Hence, in order to be reborn as an adult, one may have to pass through the psychological equivalent of the womb, that is, something that bears a **likeness** to the *opening* of the *woman* from whom you were born. [6]

女 如

105 **mama**

母

Look closely at this kanji and you will find the outline of the kanji for *woman* in it, the second stroke of which has been expanded to make space for the two breasts that make her a **mama**. Likening this sound to a baby nursing at its mother's breast has afforded some scholars of comparative linguistics a way to explain the presence of the same word across a wide range of language-groups. [5]



* As a primitive we shall add the meaning of *breasts* in accord with the explanation given above. Take careful note of the fact that the form is altered slightly when this kanji serves as a

primitive, the final two dots joining together to form a longer stroke. An example follows in the next frame.

106

pierce

貫

If one is asked to think of associations for the word **pierce**, among the first to come to mind is that of **piercing** one's ears to hold earrings, a quite primitive form of self-mutilation that has survived into the 21st century. The kanji here is read, top to bottom: *mama . . . oyster*. All you need to do is imagine **piercing** an ear so that it can hold a mother-of-pearl (actually, a *mama*-of-pearl) you have just wrested from an *oyster*. [11]



107

elder brother

兄

By now kanji like this one should "look like" something to you even though it is more of an "ideogram" than a "pictograph." The large *mouth* on top and the *human legs* below almost jump off the page as a caricature of **elder brother**, the one with the big *mouth* (or if you prefer a kinder image, the one who "has the say" among all the children). [5]



* As a primitive this character will take the meaning of *teenager*, in accord with the familiar image of the big *mouth* and the gangling, clumsy *legs*.

108

curse

呪

For some reason, the inventor of this kanji associated a **curse** with the *mouth* of an *elder brother*. I leave it to you to decide if he is on the giving or receiving end of the sorcery. [8]



109 **overcome**

克

In this frame we get a chance to use the kanji we just learned in its primitive meaning of *teenager*. The *needle* on top indicates one of the major problems confronting the *teenager* growing up in today's world: drugs. Many of them will fall under the shadow of the *needle* at some time during those tender years, but only when a whole generation rises up and decides that "We Shall **Overcome**" the plague, will the *needle* cease to hang over their heads, as it does in this character. [7]

十 克

Lesson 7

In this lesson we turn to primitive elements having to do with quantity. We will also introduce a form known as a "roof," a sort of overhead "enclosure" that comes in a variety of shapes. But let us begin slowly and not get ahead of ourselves, for it is only after you have mastered the simple forms that the apparently impenetrable complexities of later primitives will dissolve. The primitives we give here will immediately suggest others, on the basis of what we have already learned. Hence the somewhat haphazard order among the frames of this lesson.

110 **little**

小

The sense of **little** in this character is not the same as "a little bit." That meaning comes in the next frame. Here **little** means "small" or "tiny." The image is one of three **little** *drops*, the first of which (the one in the middle) is written larger so that the kanji has some shape to it. The point of writing it three times is to rub the point in: **little**, **little**, nothing but **little**. [3]

亅 小 小

* The primitive of the same shape keeps the same meaning. Written above a horizontal line, its form is slightly altered, the last two strokes turning inwards like this: ⺌.

111 少 **few**

First we need to look at the fourth stroke, the *eyedropper* at the bottom that leans towards the left. This happens because a single, isolated *drop* will NEVER appear beneath its relative primitive in its normal size, for fear it would drop off and get lost. As for the meaning, let the *eyedropper* indicate a further belittling of what is already *little*—thus making it a **few** of something *little*. [4]

亅 小 小 少

112 大 **large**

Here we have a simple pictograph of a person, taking up the space of an entire character and giving it the sense of **large**. It should not be too hard to locate the two legs and outstretched arms. [3]

一 ナ 大

* As a primitive, we need a different meaning, since the element representing the human person will come up later. Therefore, this shape will become a *large dog* or, if you prefer, a *St. Bernard dog*. In FRAME 253 we will explain why this choice was made.

113 多 **many**

"**Many** *moons* ago," begins much of Amerindian folklore—a colorful way of saying "Once upon a time" and a great deal of help for remembering this kanji. Here we have two *moons* (three of them would take us back to the beginning of time, which is further than we want to go), lacking the final stroke because they are partially hidden behind the clouds of time. [6]

ノ ク タ 夕 多 多

114 **evening**

夕

Just as the word **evening** adds a touch of formality or romanticism to the ordinary word "night," so the kanji for **evening** takes the ordinary looking *moon* in the night sky and has a cloud pass over it (as we saw in the last frame). [3]

ノ ク 夕

* The primitive keeps the same meaning and connotation as the kanji.

115 **eventide**

汐

In the next lesson we will meet the character for morning-*tide* and the element for *drops of water*. Meantime we have a perfect blend of picture and idea in this kanji to play on the English word for nightfall, **eventide**: *drops of water* inching their way up the shore in the *evening*. [6]



116 **outside**

外

On the left, the primitive for *evening,* and on the right, that for the *magic wand*. Now, as every magician worth his abracadabra knows, bringing your *magic wand* out into the *evening* air makes your magic much more powerful than if you were to stay indoors. Hence, *evening* and *magic wand* takes you naturally **outside**. [5]

夕 外

117 **name**

名

Perhaps you have heard of the custom, still preserved in certain African tribes, of a father creeping into the tent or hut of his newborn child on the night of the child's birth, to whisper into its ear the **name** he has chosen for it, before making his choice public. It is an impressive **naming** custom and fits in tidily with

the way this character is constructed: *evening . . . mouth.* At *evening* time, a *mouth* pronounces the **name** that will accompany one throughout life. [6]

夕 名

*

厂

cliff

This primitive means precisely what it looks like: a steep **cliff**. You can almost see someone standing at the top looking down into the abyss below. [2]

一 厂

118

石

stone

With a *mouth* under a *cliff*, what else could we have here but the entrance to a secret cavern, before which a great **stone** has been rolled so that none may enter. Perhaps it is the hiding place where Ali Baba and his band of thieves have stored their treasures, in which case that magic word known to every school child who ever delighted over the tales of the *Arabian Nights* should be enough to push the **stone** aside. But take care—the *cliff* is steep, and one slip will send you tumbling down into the ravine below. [5]

This is the one and only time that the second stroke in *cliff* will reach over to the middle of the horizontal stroke. If you think of the edge jutting outwards (in keeping with the story above), the problem should be taken care of.

一 丆 不 石 石

* The *stone* is a quite common primitive element, which is not restricted to great boulders but used of *stones* or *rocks* of any size or shape.

119

肖

resemblance

The word **resemblance** should suggest, among other things, a son's **resemblance** to his father. A "chip off the old block" is the

way we often put it, but the character is more simple. It speaks of a *little* bit of *flesh.* [7]

⺌ 肖

* When used as a primitive, the sense of *resemblance* is replaced by that of *spark* or *candle*. (If you want an explanation: the kanji for *moon* also carries a secondary sense of *fire*, which we omitted because we are keeping that meaning for other primitives.)

---

120 **nitrate**

硝

The word **nitrate** should immediately suggest a beaker of **nitric** acid, which, as every high-school chemistry student knows, can eat its way through some pretty tough substances. Here we imagine pouring it over a *rock* and watching the *sparks* fly as it bores a hole through the rock. [12]

石 硝

---

121 **smash**

砕

We begin with the two elements on the right, *baseball* and *needle.* Since they will be coming together from time to time, let us give the two of them the sense of a *game of cricket* in which a *needle* is laid across the wicket. Then imagine using a *rock* for a ball. A **smash** hit would probably splinter the bat in all directions, and a **smashing** pitch would do the same with the *needle* wicket. [9]

石 石九 砕

---

122 **sand**

砂

Good **sand** for beaches has *few* or no *stones* in it. That means that all of us whose feet have been spoiled by too much time in shoes don't have to watch our step as we cavort about. [9]

石 砂

123 **jealous**

妬

It should not be hard to leap from the key word to the image of a *woman* who is **jealous** of the *rock* that another *woman* is sporting on the third finger of her left hand. [8]

女 妬

124 **plane**

削

Long before the invention of the carpenter's **plane**, people used knives and machetes (or here, *sabers*) to smooth out their woodwork. If you have ever seen the process, you will have been amazed at the speed and agility with which the adept can **plane** a hunk of wood into shape. Indeed, you can almost see the *sparks* fly from their *sabers*. [9]

肖 削

125 **ray**

光

There are really only 2 primitives here, *little* and *human legs*. The 4th stroke that separates them is added for reasons of aesthetics. (If that doesn't make sense, try writing the kanji without it and see how ugly the results look, even to your beginner's eye.)

Now if you have wondered what those little particles of "dust" are that dance around in the light-**rays** that come through the window and fall on your desk, try imagining them as *little* and disembodied *human legs*, and you should have no trouble with this character. [6]

丨 丨 丨 ⺌ 业 光

126 **plump**

太

"**Plump**" is one of those delightful English words that almost sound like their meaning. No sooner do you hear it than you think of a round and ample-bodied person falling into a sofa like a *large drop* of oil plopping into a fishbowl—kerrrr-**plump**! [4]

一 ナ 大 太

127 **utensil**

器

The picture in this kanji is not a pleasant one. It shows a large and fluffy *St. Bernard dog* stretched out on a table all stuffed and stewed and garnished with vegetables, its paws in the air and an apple in its mouth. At each corner of the table sits an eager but empty *mouth*, waiting for the **utensils** to arrive so the feast can begin. [15]



128 **stinking**

臭

This character is a bit friendlier to the animal world than the last one. Our friend the *St. Bernard* is alive and well, its *nose* in the air sniffing suspiciously after something **stinking** somewhere or other. [9]

自 臭

129 **sniff**

嗅

You have seen those scratch-'n-**sniff** advertisements for perfumes. This one is for a *mouth*wash that replaces one *stinking* odor with another. [12]

口 嗅

130 **exquisite**

妙

The primitive for *woman* is on the left (there and at the bottom of another primitive is where you will always find her), and to the right the element for *few.* When we refer to a *woman* as **exquisite**, we mean to praise her as the sort of person we meet but *few* and far between.

If you are interested in etymologies, it might help to recall that the Latin phrase lying at the root of the English word **exquisite**

carries this same sense of "seeking out" the rare from the ordinary. [7]

女 妙

131 **focus**

省

When we think of **focusing** on something, we usually take it in a metaphorical sense, though the literal sense is not far behind. It means to block out what is nonessential in order to fix our *eye* on a *few* important matters. The kanji suggests picking up a *few* things and holding them before one's *eye* in order to **focus** on them better. [9]

少 省

132 **thick**

厚

When we refer to someone as **thick**-skinned or **thick**-headed, we are usually quick to add—even if only under our breath—something about their upbringing. Perhaps it is because deep down we cherish the belief that by nature people are basically tender and sensitive.

Be that as it may, the Japanese character for **thick** depicts a *child* abandoned out on the wild *cliffs*, exposed to the heat of the *sun*, and thus doomed to develop a head and skin as **thick** as the parent who left it there. [9]

一 厂 戸 厚

133 **strange**

奇

The elements we are given to work with here are *St. Bernard dog* and *can*. Lots of phrases pop to mind to attach these words to the key word, but they end up too abstract because of the word *can*.

It is important in such cases (and there will be plenty of them as we go along) to stick closely to the elements, in this case, *mouth* and *nails*. Now all we need do is create a fictitious

"**Strange** But True" column in the Sunday funnies, featuring a *St. Bernard* whose *mouth* has been *nailed* shut because he was hitting the brandy keg around his neck too hard. [8]

大 奇

Lesson 8

FOUR BASIC ELEMENTS, it was once believed, make up the things of our universe: earth, wind, fire, and water. We have already met the element for *wind*, and now we shall introduce the others, one by one, in a somewhat longer than usual lesson.

Fortunately for our imaginative memories, these suggestive and concrete primitives play a large role in the construction of the kanji, and will help us create some vivid pictures to untangle some of the complex jumbles of strokes that follow.

134 **stream**

川

We have taken the image of a river **stream** over into English to describe things that fall down in straight lines, or ripple along in lines. All of this is more than evident in the kanji given here, a pictograph of a **stream**. [3]

丿 丿丨 川

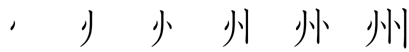
* As a primitive, this character adds to the meaning of *stream* the more vivid image of a *flood*. Note, however, that there are certain small changes in the writing of the element, depending on where it appears relative to other elements:

on the left, it is written 川
on the top, it is written 巛
on the bottom, it is written 川

135 **state**

州

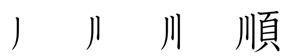
Here we see *drops of* land (little islets) rising up out of a *stream*, creating a kind of sandbar or breakwater. Ever wonder how the **state**-line is drawn between **states** separated by a river? If there were little *drops of* land as in the kanji, there'd be nothing to it. [6]



136 **obey**

順

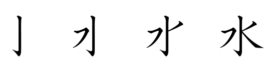
In primitive language, this character would read *stream . . . head*. And that turns out to be convenient for remembering its meaning of **obey**. Either one **obeys** the person who is *head* of an organization or else **obeys** by following the *stream* of opinion ("current" practice, we call it). Both these senses come together in this kanji. [12].



137 **water**

水

This character, which looks a bit like a snowflake, is actually a pictograph of **water**—not any particular body of water or movement of water, but simply the generic name for **water**. Should you have any difficulty remembering it, simply think of a *walking stick* being dropped vertically into the **water**, sending *droplets* out in all four directions. Then all you need to learn is how to write it in proper order. [4]



* As a primitive, this character can keep its form, or it can be written with three drops to the left of another primitive, like this: 氵. This latter, as we will see, is far more common.

138 **icicle**

氷

The appearance of the primitive for *water* in its full form tells us that we have something to do with *water* here. The extra *drop* to the left, added as a second stroke, changes the picture from a

splash caused by a *walking stick* dropped into *water* to form an **icicle**.

If it helps, when you hold an **icicle** up to the light, you can usually see little crystallizations of five-pointed stars inside of it, which is the shape we have in this kanji. [5]

亅 冫 氵 氺 氷

---

139 **eternity**

永

This kanji also uses the full form of *water*, though its meaning seems to have nothing at all to do with *water*. Remember what William Blake said about seeing "infinity in a grain of sand and **eternity** in an hour"? Well, reading this character from top to bottom, we see "**eternity** in a *drop of water*." [5]

丶 亅 刁 永 永

---

140 **spring**

泉

Call to mind the image of a fresh, bubbling **spring** of *water*, and you will probably notice how the top of the **spring** you are thinking of, the part where the "bubbling" goes on, is all *white*. Happily, the *white* is just where it should be, at the top, and the *water* is at the bottom. [9]

白 白 泉 泉 泉

* We will keep this image of a *spring* when using this kanji as a primitive, but not without first drawing attention to a slight change that distinguishes the primitive from the kanji. The final 4 strokes (the element for *water*) are abbreviated to the three small *drops* that we learned earlier as the kanji for *little,* giving us: 泉.

---

141 **gland**

腺

Dig into your flesh and pull out a lymph **gland**. Now give it a squeeze and watch a *spring* of lymph spout out of it. [13]

月 腺

142 **meadow**

原

Though the kanji is broad enough to embrace both meanings, the **meadow** you should imagine here is not a flatland plain but a mountain **meadow** in the Austrian Alps. (Perhaps the opening scene of "The Sound of Music" will help.) Simply think of little *springs* bubbling up across the **meadow** to form a sort of path that leads you right to the brink of a precipitous *cliff*. Now if you can see Schwester Maria skipping along merrily, dodging in and out of the *springs*, and then falling headlong over the *cliff*, you have a ridiculous story that should help fix this kanji in memory. [10]

厂 戸 原

143 **petition**

願

A *meadow* and a *head* are all we are given to work with in the kanji for **petition**. Since the key word already suggests something like a formal request made of some higher power, let us imagine a gigantic Wizard-of-Oz *head* located in the middle of the flowery *meadow* we used in the last frame. Then just picture people kneeling hopefully before it, **petitioning** for whatever it is they want. (The scarecrow wanted brains, the lion, courage, and the tin man a heart. What about you?) [19]

原 願

144 **swim**

泳

The primitive to the left, you will recall from FRAME 137, represents *water*. To the right, we see the kanji for *eternity*. Knowing how much children like **swimming**, what could be a better image of *eternal* bliss than an endless expanse of *water* to **swim** in without a care in the world? [8]

氵 泳

145

marsh

沼

Unlike the meadow with its cliffs, the **marsh**lands are low and near a source of *water* that feeds them until they get soggy through and through. Why certain land becomes **marshy** is probably due to the fact that it felt thirsty, and so tried its best to *seduce* the *water* over to its side. But, like most inordinate *seductions*, the last state of the victim is worse than the first. Hence the slushy **marsh**. [8]

氵 沼

146

open sea

沖

This kanji could hardly be simpler. The key word **open sea** readily suggests being out *in* the middle of a great body of *water*. Thinking of it in this way should avoid confusion with the kanji for "open," which we will meet later on. [7]

氵 沖

147

pan-

汎

The sense of the key word here is the "all-inclusive" we find in terms like "**Pan**-American Games." (It is also the character used in mathematics for "partial" as in partial differentials, in case you are a math major and want to take your story in that direction.) Instead of a *water* sports event that brings together the best talent, think of a meet of the region's most *mediocre* athletes, many of whom cannot even tread *water*. Now try to find a sponsor for the "**Pan**-*Mediocre Water* Sports Competition." [6]

氵 汎

148

creek

江

Unlike the river, the ocean, the lake, and the pond, the **creek** is often no more then a dribble of *water* trickling down a small gully. While the geological history of the larger bodies of *water* is hard to surmise sometimes, all of us know from our childhood how **creeks** are made. You probably even dug one or two

in your time. All you need to do is find a mainstream of *water* somewhere and dig a little path into dry land. The **creek** is thus a lesson in *water-craft*, as this kanji would agree. [6]

氵 江

149 **cleanse**

汰

This character can mean both to **cleanse** and to make dirty. We will choose the latter and imagine someone who is displeasingly *plump* going to a skinny spa whose medicinal *waters* promise to **cleanse** him of his unwanted corpulence. Picture him sitting in the spa as the pounds melt away, leaving a greasy scum on top of the *water.* [7]

氵 汰

150 **soup**

汁

To make **soup**, one begins with *water* and then starts adding things to it, often leftovers from the icebox. This is how the thick **soup** or stew called "seven-in-one" is made. This kanji does it three better, giving us a *ten*-ingredient **soup**. [5]

氵 汁

151 **grains of sand**

沙

We have already learned the kanji for *sand* (FRAME 122), so let's use it to remember the character for **grains of sand**. Instead of the "few stones" that make for nice sand, here we have a *few drops of water*, one for each **grain of sand**—a beach in perfect ecological balance. [7]

氵 沙

152 **tide**

潮

Before we get to explaining this character, take a look at it and see if you can figure out the primitive elements on your own.… On the left is the *water*—that much is easy. On the right we have

only one primitive, the kanji for *morning* learned back in FRAME 53. See how an apparently complex kanji falls apart neatly into manageable pieces?

To get the meaning of the key word **tide**, just think of it in connection with the character for *eventide* that we learned back in FRAME 115. Here we have the *morning*-**tide**, its complement.

By the way, if you missed the question about the number of primitives, it is probably because you forgot what we said earlier about kanji becoming primitives, independently of the pieces that make them up. As a rule, look for the largest kanji you can write and proceed from there to primitives stranded on their own. [15]

氵 潮

153 **source**

源

With the advice of the last frame in mind, it is easy to see *water* and *meadow* in this character for **source**. Both in its etymology (it has a common parent with the word "surge") and in popular usage, **source** suggests the place *water* comes from. In this kanji, it is under the *meadow*, where we just saw it breaking the surface in those bubbly little springs. [13]

氵 源

154 **lively**

活

When we speak of a **lively** personality or a **lively** party, we immediately think of a lot of chatter. This kanji depicts the idea of **lively** by having *tongues* babble and splash around like flowing *water*. [9]

氵 活

155 **extinguish**

消

Among the many things *water* is useful for is **extinguishing** fires, and that is just what we have here. First of all, take the *water* at the left as the *drops of water* that are used to depict *water* in general. In the best of all possible worlds, the most effi-

cient way to **extinguish** a fire would be to see that each *drop of water* hits one *spark* of the conflagration. An unthinkable bit of utopian fire fighting, you say to yourself, but helpful for assigning this key word its primitives. [10]

氵 消

156 **but of course**

況

This key word is a connector used to link contrasting phrases and sentences together with much the same flavor as the English phrase **but of course**. Just picture yourself ready to go off on your first date as a *teenager*, and having your mother grill you about your manners and ask you embarrassing questions about your hygiene. "Did you have a good shower?" "**But of course**…," you reply, annoyed. So *water* and *teenager* combine to give us **but of course**. [8]

氵 況

157 **river**

河

The character in this frame represents a step up from the *stream* we met in FRAME 134; it is a full-sized **river**. The *water* to the left tells us what we are dealing with, and the *can* at the right tells us that our "little engine that *could*" has now become amphibious and is chugging down the Mighty Mississip' like a regular riverboat. [8]

氵 河

158 **overnight**

泊

When you stop at an inn for an **overnight** rest, all you expect is a bit of *water* for a wash and a set of clean *white* sheets to wrap your weary bones in. [8]

氵 泊

159 **lake**

湖

Water . . . old . . . flesh. You have heard of legends of people being abandoned in the mountains when they had become too *old* to work. Well, here is a legend about people being set adrift in the *waters* of a stormy **lake** because their *flesh* had gotten too *old* to bear the burdens of life. [12]

氵 沽 湖

160 **fathom**

測

Connoting the measurement of the depth of *water*, the key word **fathom** begins with the *water* primitive. To its right, we see the compound-primitive for *rule* (FRAME 92) which we learned in the sense of a "ruler" or "measure." Hence, when we *rule water* we **fathom** it. What could be simpler? But be careful; its simplicity is deceptive. Be sure to picture yourself **fathoming** a body of *water* several hundred feet deep by using a *ruler* of gargantuan proportions. [12]

氵 測

161 **soil**

土

I don't like it any more than you do, but this kanji is not the pictograph it is trumped up to be: a mound of **soil** piled on the ground. All I can recommend is that you memorize it as it is. Anyway, it will be occurring with such frequency that you have almost no chance of forgetting it, even if you try. [3]

一 十 土

* As a primitive, the sense of *soil* is extended to that of *ground* because of its connection with the kanji for the same (FRAME 554). From there it also takes the added meanings of *dirt* and *land*.

162 **spit**

吐

We have here a rather small *mouth* (it is always compressed when set on the left) next to a much larger piece of *dirt*. It is not hard to imagine what you might do if you got a *mouth* full of *dirt*. As least I know what I would do: **spit** it out as fast and far as I could! [6]

口 吐

163 **pressure**

压

One of the things that causes the erosion of *soil* is the excessive **pressure** of the top*soil* on the lower *soil*. This can be caused by any number of things from heavy rainfall to heavy buildings to the absence of sufficient deep-rooted vegetation to hold the layers together. Here we see a steep *cliff* without a tree in sight. The slightest **pressure** on it will cause a landslide, which, with a little help from your imagination, you will be able to see happening in this character. [5]

厂 压

164 **cape**

埼

The **cape** pictured here is a jut of *land* like **Cape** Cod. The *soil* on the left tells us we have to do with *land*, and the *strange* on the right tells us it is a *cape* where unusual things go on. Put a haunted house on it, an eerie sky overhead, and a howling wind rustling through the trees, and you have yourself a picture of **Cape** *Strange* (or, if you prefer, **Cape** *Odd*). [11]

扌 埼

165 **hedge**

垣

The **hedge** depicted in this frame is not your ordinary run-of-the-suburbs shrubbery, but the miraculous **hedge** of briar roses that completely *spanned* the castle *grounds* in which Sleeping Beauty lay for a hundred years, so that none but her predestined beloved could find his way through it. [9]

扌 垣

166

填

inlay

When we hear the word **inlay**, we usually think of setting precious stones in pieces of jewelery, but the primitive elements here suggest *truth* being **inlaid** in the *soil*. You might think instead of the cosmic wisdom that **inlaid** the *truth* of the universe in the stuff of the earth. [13]

扌 填

167

圭

squared jewel

Now I am going to do something unusual. The character in this frame is going to get one meaning and the primitive another, with no relation at all between the two. In time, I hope you will see how helpful this is.

The kanji key word, **squared jewel**, depicts a mammoth precious stone, several feet high, made by piling up large heaps of *soil* on top of one another. Not something you would want to present your betrothed on your wedding day, but a good image for remembering this rare character, used chiefly in personal names nowadays. [6]

一 十 土 圭 圭 圭

* As a primitive, we shall use this character to mean *ivy*, that creepy vegetation that covers the surface of the *ground* to form a sort of "second" *ground* that can get somewhat tricky to walk on without tripping.

168

封

seal

Think of the key word **seal** as referring to a letter you have written and are preparing to close. Instead of using the traditional wax **seal**, you *glue* a sprig of *ivy* on the outside. In this way the elements *ivy* and *glue* give you a curious and memorable way to **seal** your secret letters. [9]

圭 封

169 **horizon**

涯

After seeing a constant **horizon** of *water*, *water* everywhere for months at sea, could there be anything more delightful to the eyes than to look astern and see the *ivy*-clad *cliffs* of land on a new **horizon**? Of course, you'd need the eyes of a stellar telescope to recognize that the vegetation was in fact *ivy*, but the phrase "*ivy*-clad *cliffs*" has such a nice ring to it that we won't worry about such details. [11]

氵 汇 涯

170 **Buddhist temple**

寺

You have heard of people "attaching" themselves to a particular sect? Here is your chance to take that metaphor literally and imagine some fellow walking into a **Buddhist temple** with a fervent resolve to attach himself to the place. Since there is plenty of unused *land* around the precincts, he simply picks out a suitable patch, brushes the soles of his feet with *glue,* steps down firmly, and so joins the **Buddhist temple** as a "permanent member." [6]

土 寺

171 **time**

時

"What is **time**?" asked St. Augustine in his memoirs. "Ask me not, and I know. Ask me, and I cannot tell you." Here we have the kanji's answer to that perennial riddle. **Time** is a *sun* rising over a *Buddhist temple*. It sounds almost like a Zen kōan whose repetition might yield some deep secret to the initiated. At any rate, imagining a monk seated in meditation pondering it might help us remember the character. [10]

日 時

172 **level**

均

The **level** this key word refers to is not the carpenter's tool but rather the even surface of a thing. It pictures *soil* being scooped up into a *ladle* and then made **level** (apparently because one is measuring *soil*). The excess *drops of soil* are brushed off the top, which accounts for the added *drop* at the *ladle's* edge. [7]



173 **fire**

火

Just as sitting before a **fire** enlivens the imagination and lets you see almost anything you want to in the flames, this kanji is so simple it lets you see almost any sort of **fire** you want to see. It no longer makes a good pictograph, but I invite you to take a pencil and paper and play with the form—first writing it as shown below and then adding lines here and there—to see what you can come up with. Everything from matchbooks to cigarette lighters to volcanic eruptions to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah have been found here. No doubt you, too, will find something interesting to bend your memory around these four simple strokes. [4]



* To avoid confusion later on, it is best to keep to the meaning of a *fireplace* (or *hearth*) or a raging *conflagration* like a forest fire for this kanji's primitive meaning. Another primitive element for *fire*, based on this one, is written 灬 and will mean *flames, cauldron, cooking fire,* or an *oven fire*.

174 **inflammation**

炎

A *fire* belongs IN the *hearth*, not OVER it. When the *fire* spreads to the rest of the house, we have an **inflamed** house. And as with any **inflammation**—including those that attack our bodies—the danger is always that it might spread if not checked. This is the sense behind the reduplication of the element for *fire*, one atop the other [8]

丶 丷 ⺌ 火 火 炎 炎 炎

175

anxiety

煩

The existential condition of **anxiety** that arises from the inevitable frustration of our worldly passions is contained in this character. The *head* is set *afire*, causing deep torment of spirit (and a whopper of a headache). [13]

丶 丷 ⺌ 火 煩

176

thin

淡

The primitives in this kanji read: *water . . . inflammation*. Taking *inflammation* in its medical sense, the first *water*-related *inflammation* that pops into mind is dehydration, the principal symptom of which is that it makes one shrivel up and look very, very **thin**. If that is hard to remember, try thinking it backwards: a very **thin** chap passes by and you imagine him suffering from (being *inflamed* with) dehydration (hence the element for *water*). [11]

氵 淡

177

lamp

灯

Since it is very hard to read by the *fireplace* without going blind from the flickering of the flames or burning up from the heat, our ancestors invented a way to *nail* down a bit of that *fire*, just enough to light up the text of their evening newspapers and no more. Voilà! The **lamp**. [6]

火 灯

178

farm

畑

Looking at the primitives, a *fireplace* and a *rice field*, we find the essential ingredients for a **farm**: a warm *hearth* to sit by at night, and a well-plowed *field* to grow one's crops in by day. [9]

火 畑

179 **disaster**

災

Of all of nature's **disasters**, this kanji picks out two of the worst: *floods* and *fires*. To recall the disposition of the elements, think of nature's solution to nature's own problem: a great *flood* pouring down over a great forest *fire*. [7]

く 巛 巛 災

180 **ashes**

灰

The kanji for **ashes** naturally includes the primitive for *fire*, or more specifically, a *fireplace*. Now what do you do with that bucket of **ashes** you have just cleaned out of the *fireplace*? You walk to the edge of a *cliff* and tip it upside down, watching as they are swept away in the wind like a swarm of gray mosquitoes. Thus the *fire*, once it has turned to **ashes**, ends up at the bottom of the *cliff*. [6]

厂 灰

181 **spot**

点

If you look into the flickering of a *fire* for a long time and then turn aside, you will see **spots** before your eyes. Although nobody ever thought of such a thing before—as least as far as I know, they didn't—imagine using those **spots** as a technique for *fortune-telling*. The old witch sits before her *cauldron* and watches the **spots** that show up when she turns to look at you, and from that *tells your fortune*. Think of it as a kind of **spot**-check on your future. [9]

占 占 点 点 点

182 **illuminate**

照

Although the range of possible meanings that the kanji for **illuminate** can have is about as rich as the connotations of the

English word, we need to focus on just one of them: to make something *shine*. If you glaze a pot and put it into the *oven* to *fire* it, you in fact *illuminate* it. Hence the kanji for **illuminate** compares the kanji for *shining* with the primitive element for the *oven's fire*. [13]

日 昭 照

183 **fish**

魚

The composition of this kanji shows three elements, which we list in the order of their writing: *bound up . . . rice field . . . cooking fire*. Not much to work with at first sight. But we can join them together by thinking of a three-part story: first a **fish** is caught and *bound up* on a line with its unfortunate school-mates; when the fisherman gets home, he cuts off the head and tosses it, with the entrails, out into the *rice fields* for fertilizer; and the rest he sets in a skillet over a *cooking fire* for his supper. [11]

⺈ 鱼 魚

184 **fishing**

漁

To the story we have just made about *fish*, this kanji for the profession of **fishing** adds yet another element BEFORE the others: namely the *water*, where the fish was happily at home before being caught, disemboweled, and eaten. Be sure to get a clear image of the *water* when you put it all together. [14]

氵 漁

Lesson 9

ALTHOUGH THE study of the four basic elements undertaken in the last lesson brought us a lot of new characters—51 in all—we have only scratched the surface as far as *water*, *earth*, *wind*, *and fire* are concerned. Perhaps by now it

is clear why I said at the beginning of this lesson that we are lucky that they appear so frequently. The range of images they suggest is almost endless.

In this chapter our focus will be on a few new "roof" and "enclosure" primitives. But first, a primitive-kanji that we might have included in the last group but omitted so as not to be distracted from the four elements. With just that one element we can pick up no less than 7 new kanji with no trouble at all.

185 *ri*

里

That's right—a ***ri***. Don't bother looking it up in your English dictionary; it's a Japanese word for measuring distances. One ***ri*** is about 4 kilometers or 2.5 miles. The kanji depicts how the measure came to be used. Atop we see the *rice field*, and below the element for *land*. Those four sections you see in the *rice field* (and which we made mention of when first we introduced the character in FRAME 14) are actually measurements of *land*, much the same as farm-sections in the United States have given us the notion of a "country mile." The *land* division based on the size of a *rice field* is called a ***ri***. [7]



* To get a more concrete primitive meaning for this kanji, we shall refer to it as a *computer*, a meaning deriving from the kanji for *logic*, which we will meet in LESSON 12.

186 black

黒

Like most things electrical, a *computer*, too, can overheat. Just imagine *flames* pouring out of it and charring the keyboard, the monitor, and your desk a sooty **black** color. [11]



187 black ink

墨

Besides meaning **black ink**, this kanji also appears in the word for an inked string that is pulled taut and snapped to mark a

surface, much the same as one might used a chalked string. Here it is used to mark off the *dirt* with *black* lines for a football game (played, I presume, on a white field). [14]

黒 墨

188 **carp**

鯉

These are the same **carp** you see in Japanese "**carp** streamers." Only here we find a small home *computer* or two strung on the line by a father anxious for his son not only to have the courage and determination of a **carp** swimming upstream, but also the efficiency and memory of a *computer*. Ugh. [18]

⻥ 鯉

189 **quantity**

量

Think of **quantity** as having to do with measuring time and distance, and the rest is simple: you have a quantity of time in the new day that begins with *nightbreak*, and a quantity of distance in the rural *ri*. [12]

⺜ 旦 量

190 ***rin***

厘

No doubt you will find it in your heart to forgive me for forcing yet another Japanese word on you in this frame. It is not the last time it will happen in this book, but I can assure you they are used only when absolutely necessary.

One ***rin*** is equal to about 1/1000 of a yen—or rather was worth that much when it still made economic sense to mint them. While inflation took its toll on this kanji as a monetary unit, it survived with the not at all surprising sense of something "very, very tiny."

The kanji shows a *cliff* with a *computer* under it, apparently because it has been pushed over into the abyss by someone fed up with the thing. The total market value of one home *computer* that has fallen over rock and bramble for several hundred feet: about one ***rin***! [9]

厂 厘

191 **bury**

埋 When we speak of **burying** something (or someone, for that matter), we usually mean putting them under *ground*. Only here, we are **burying** our beloved *computer* that has served us so well these past years. Behind us a choir chants the "Dies irae, dies illa" and there is much wailing and grief among the bystanders as they pass by to shovel a little *dirt* into what will be its final resting place. R.I.P. [10]

扌 埋

Before going any further, we might pause a moment to look at precisely WHERE the primitive elements were placed in the kanji of the last frame: the *ground* to the left and the *computer* to the right. Neither of these is an absolutely fixed position. The kanji for *spit* (FRAME 162), for instance, puts *ground* on the right, and that for *plains* (FRAME 1722) will put the *computer* on the left. While there is no reason to bother memorizing any "rules," a quick glance through a few general guidelines may help. Use them if they help; if not, simply adjust the story for a problem character in such a way as to help you remember the position of the elements relative to one another.

In any case, here are the guidelines that follow from the kanji treated up to this point:

1. Many kanji used regularly as primitives have a "strong" position or two from which they are able to give a basic "flavor" to the character. For example, *ground* at the left (or bottom) usually indicates something to do with earth, soil, land, and the like; *fire* at the bottom in the form of the four dots, or at the left in its compressed kanji form, usually tells us we have to do with heat, passion, and the like; a *mouth* at the left commonly signifies something to do with eating, coughing, spitting, snoring, screaming, and so forth. Where these elements appear elsewhere in the kanji, they do not have the same overall impact on its meaning as a rule.
2. Some primitive elements ALWAYS have the same position in a kanji. We saw this earlier in the case of the primitive meaning *head* (FRAME 64) and that for the long *saber* (FRAME 87), as well as in the three drops of *water* (FRAME 137).

3. Enclosures like *cliff* (see FRAME 118) and *bound up* (FRAME 67) are always set above whatever it is they enclose. Others, as we shall see later, "wrap up" a kanji from the bottom.
4. All things being equal, the element with the fewer strokes (usually the more common element) has first rights to the "strong" position at the left or bottom. (Note that the left and bottom cannot BOTH be the dominant position in the same character. Either one or the other of them will dominate, usually the left.) The characters for *nitrate* (FRAME 120) and *chant* (FRAME 21) illustrate the point.

---

* **hood**

冂

In addition to the basic meaning of **hood**, this shape can be used for a **glass canopy**, such as that used to serve "pheasant under glass." Note its difference from the element for *wind*: the second stroke is hooked INWARDS here. To help remember this detail, think of the wind as blowing "out" and a **glass canopy** as keeping something "in." Among the related images suggested by this primitive are: a monk's **cowl**, a riding **hood**, a **helmet**, and an automobile **hood**. [2]



---

192 **same**

同

The primitives given are *one* and *mouth* under a *hood*. Take the key word to connote the **sameness** that characterizes the life in a community of monks. They all have the **same** habits, including the "habit" they wear on their backs. Here we see the monk's *cowl*, drawn down over the eyes so that all you can see when you look at him is a *mouth*. But since monks also speak their prayers in common, it is but a short step to think of *one mouth* under a *hood* as the kanji for the **sameness** of monastic life. [6]



* As a primitive, this kanji will mean *monks* dressed in a common habit.

193 **den**

洞

The key word **den** refers to an animal lair hollowed out in the side of a mountain. Now if we keep to the image of the monastic life as an image for *same*, we can picture a **den** of wild beasts dressed up in habits and living the common life in a mountain cavern. To bring in the element of *water* we need only give them a sacred "puddle" in the center of their **den**, the focus of all their pious attentions. [9]

氵 洞

194 **trunk**

胴

The word **trunk** refers to the *part of the body* that is left when you have "**truncated**" all the limbs. I can hardly think of any reason for doing so, unless one were lumberjacking corpses and needed to have them all properly pruned and made the *same* so they could be floated downstream without causing a *body*-jam. [10]

月 胴

195 **yonder**

向

Something referred to as "over **yonder**" is usually far off in the distance and barely within sight—like a wee *drop* in the distance—and is usually an expression used in giving directions or pointing something out. Hence this kanji begins with a *drop*. Then we find a sort of transparent *helmet* with no eyes or nose, but only a prominent *mouth* under it, obviously an extraterrestrial. And what is it jabbering on about with its *mouth* open like that? Why, about his spaceship way over **yonder** with its fuel tank on empty. [6]

丿 门 向

196 **esteem**

尚

Above we see the primitive for *little* attached to one of those *glass canopies* you might use to display a family heirloom. The

littleness is important, because what is in fact on display is the shrunken, stuffed, and mounted *mouth* of an **esteemed** ancestor. We may be used to **esteeming** the words our forebears leave behind, but here we also **esteem** the very *mouth* that spoke them. I leave it to you to imagine a suitable place in your room for displaying such an unusual conversation piece. [8]



---

*

宀

house

This extremely useful primitive element depicts the roof of a **house**. You can see the chimney at the top and the eaves on either side without much trouble. It is a "crown" element, which means that it is invariably set atop other things. Examples follow immediately. [3]

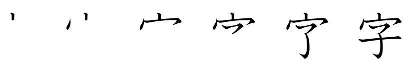


197

字

character

Here is the character for **character** itself. Not just kanji, but any written **character** from hieroglyphs to Sanskrit to our own Roman alphabet. It shows us simply a *child* in a *house*. But let us take advantage of the double meaning of the key word to note that just as a *child* born to a Japanese *house* is given **characters** for its name, so it is also stamped with the **character** of those who raise it from infancy on. [6]



198

守

guard

The notion of **guarding** something easily brings to mind the image of someone standing **guard**, like the royal soldiers in front of Buckingham Palace or the Pope's Swiss **Guard**. The whole idea of hiring **guards** is that they should stick like *glue* to your *house* to protect it from unwanted prowlers. So go ahead and *glue* a **guard** to your *house* in imagination. [6]

宀 守

199 完 **perfect**

In order not to confuse the key word **perfect** with others nearly synonymous in meaning, pull it apart to have a look at its native Latin roots. *Per-factum* suggests something so "thoroughly made or done" that nothing more needs to be added to it. Now look at the kanji, which does something similar. We see a *house* that has been made **perfectly** from its *beginnings* in the foundation to the roof on the top. Now return to FRAME 101 and make sure not to confuse this key word with the kanji for *complete*. [7]

宀 完

200 宣 **proclaim**

Under the primitive for *house* we meet the kanji for *span*. Think of the key word in its religious sense of missionary preaching: "**proclaiming** the good news to all nations" and "shouting it from the *housetops*." That should be enough to help you remember this simple kanji, used in fact both for traditional missionary work as well as for one of its contemporary replacements: advertising. [9]

宀 宣

201 宵 **wee hours**

As the key word hints, the kanji in this frame refers to the late evening or early morning hours, well after one should be in bed asleep. It does this by picturing a *house* with a *candle* in it. The reason is obvious: whoever is living there is "burning the *candle* at both ends," and working night after night into the **wee hours**. [10]

宀 宵

202 **relax**

安

To be told that the place of the *woman* is in the *house* may not sit well with modern thought, but like all cultural habits the Chinese characters bear the birthmarks of their age. So indulge yourself in a Norman Rockwell image of **relaxing** after a hard day's work: the scruffy and weary *woman* of the *house* slouched asleep in the living room chair, her hair in curlers and a duster lying in her lap. [6]

宀 安

203 **banquet**

宴

To carry on from the last frame, we note the entire *day* of work that comes between a *woman* and her *house* in preparing for a dinner **banquet**, pictorially "interrupting" her *relaxation*. [10]

宀 宣 宴

204 **draw near**

寄

Let the idea of **drawing near** suggest something dangerous or eerie that one approaches with fear and trembling. Here we see a *strange house*—perhaps the haunted *House* of Usher that Edgar Allen Poe immortalized, or the enchanted Gingerbread *House* that lured Hansel and Gretel to **draw near**. [11]

宀 寄

205 **wealth**

富

Here we have the original character on which the primitive element for **wealth** is based. In keeping with the story introduced back then, note how all the **wealth** is kept under the roof of the same *house*. [12]

宀 富

206 **savings**

貯

To avoid confusing this frame with the last one, try to think of **savings** as actual money. The only difference is that our currency is not paper bills but *shells*, a not uncommon unit of exchange in older civilizations. The *nail* under the roof of the *house* points to a hiding place in the rafters on which one strings up one's *shells* for safekeeping. [12]

貝　貝宀　貯

Lesson 10

OF THE SEVERAL primitive elements that have to do with plants and grasses, we introduce two of the most common in this lesson: *trees* and *flowers*. In most cases, as we shall see, their presence in a "strong" position (in this case, to the left and at the top, respectively) helps give a meaning to the kanji. Where this is not the case, we shall do our best to MAKE it so.

207 **tree**

木

Here we see a pictograph of a **tree**, showing the main trunk in the long vertical stroke and the boughs in the long horizontal stroke. The final two strokes sweep down in both directions to indicate the roots. Although it may look similar at first sight to the kanji for *water* (FRAME 137), the order in which it is written is completely different and this affects its final appearance. [4]

一　十　才　木

* As a primitive, this kanji can mean *tree* or *wood*. When the last two strokes are detached from the trunk (朩), we shall change its meaning to *pole*, or *wooden pole*.

208

林

grove

Learn this frame in connection with the next one. A **grove** is a small cluster of *trees*. Hence the simple reduplication of the kanji for *tree* gives us the **grove**. [8]

一 十 才 木 林

209

森

forest

A **forest** is a large expanse of *trees*, or "*trees*, *trees* everywhere," to adopt the expression we used back in FRAMES 22 and 23. [12]

木 森 森

210

桂

Japanese Judas-tree

Unless you are a botanist, you are not likely to know what a **Japanese Judas-tree** looks like, and probably never even heard of it before, but the name is sufficiently odd to make remembering it easy. Using the primitives as our guide, we define it as a *tree* with *ivy* growing down its branches in the shape of a hangman's rope. [10]

木 桂

211

柏

oak

This kanji calls to mind the famous myth of the "golden bough." As you may recall, what made the sacred **oak** in the forest of Diana the Huntress outside of Rome "golden" were the *white* berries of the mistletoe that grew in the branches of the tree. When the light of the sun shone through them, they turned yellow and the branch to which they clung appeared to be made of gold. (If you don't know the story, take a break today and hunt it down in a dictionary of myth and fable. Even if you forget the kanji—which, of course, you won't—the story of the mistletoe and the fate it brought to Balder the Beautiful is one you are sure to remember.) [9]

木 柏

212 **frame**

枠

You might think of the **frame** this character refers to as the sort of **frame** we have created by drawing a dark line around this kanji and its explanation. Then think of that line as made of very thin *wood*; and finally note how each time the line bends it forms a 90° angle, thus giving us the *nine* and the *ten*. [8]

木 朸 枠

213 **treetops**

梢

As the days grow shorter and shorter, or so the northern European myth goes, the fear grows that the sun will take its leave of us altogether, abandoning the world to total darkness. Fixing *candles* to the branches of evergreen *trees*, it was believed, would lure the sun back (like things attracting like things), whence the custom of the lighted tree that eventually found its way into our Christmas customs. The story is a lot longer and more complex than that, but it should help to fix the image of climbing high up into the **treetops** to fix *candles* on the *tree*. [11]

木 梢

214 **shelf**

棚

One often thinks of books as "good *companions*," but here it is the **shelf** we store them on that is the *companion*. The reasons should be obvious: it is made of the same stuff, *wood*, and spends a lot more time with them than we do! Here again, be careful not to let the rationality of the explanation get in the way before you turn it into a proper story. [12]

木 棚

215 **apricot**

杏

Since **apricots** can be eaten just as they fall from the *trees*, picture this *mouth* agape at the bottom of a *tree* (just as the elements have it), waiting for **apricots** to fall into it. [7]

木 杏

216

桐 **paulownia**

Since you probably don't know what a **paulownia** *tree* is, we shall let the key word suggest the phrase "the Little Brothers of St. **Paulownia.**" It is a short step to associate the *tree* with the *monks* to its right. (For the curious, the name of this oriental *tree* really comes from a Russian princess, Anna Pavlovna.) [10]

木 桐

217

植 **plant**

You have no doubt seen how people practicing the Japanese art of bonsai take those helpless little saplings and twist them into crippled dwarves before they have a chance to grow up as they should. The more proper way to **plant** a young *tree* and give it a fair shake in life is to set it into the earth in such a way that it can grow up straight—and *straightaway*. [12]

木 植

218

椅 **chair**

Instead of making a **chair** out of wood from a *tree*, this kanji has us making the whole *tree* into a **chair**, which looks most *strange* sitting in your living room where the sofa used to be. [12]

木 椅

219

枯 **wither**

What makes a *tree* begin to **wither** up, and perhaps even die, is a kind of arteriosclerosis that keeps its sap from flowing freely. Usually this is due to simple *old* age, as this character shows us. Be sure to picture a wrinkled *old tree*, **withering** away in a retirement center so that the commonsense explanation does not take over. [9]

木 枯

220 朴 **crude**

As all magicians who have passed their apprenticeship know, one makes one's *wand* out of a hazel branch and is careful not to alter the natural form of the *wood*. For the magic of the *wand* derives its power from its association with the hidden laws of nature, and needs therefore to be kept in its **crude**, natural state. [6]

木 朴

221 村 **town**

The character for *village* was associated with *rice fields* (FRAME 96). That for **town**, a step up on the evolutionary path to cities, shows a circle of *trees glued together* to measure off the confines of a **town**. [7]

木 村

222 相 **inter-**

The prefix **inter-** stirs up associations of cooperation among people. From there we read off the elements: *tree* . . . *eye*. With only a slight leap of the imagination, those two words call to mind the scriptural proverb about first taking the block of timber out of one's own *eye* before helping your neighbors remove the splinters in their eyes. What more useful rule for **inter**-human relationships, and what more useful tool for remembering this kanji! [9]

木 相

223 机 **desk**

We need to fix imagination here on two things to learn the kanji for **desk**: the wonderful rough *wood* of which it has been hewn and the *wind* that blows across it, sending your papers flying all

over the room. These two elements, written in that order, dictate how to write the character. [6]

木 机

224 **book**

本

Recalling that **books** are made of paper, and paper made of *trees*, one might think of a **book** as a slice of a *tree*. Can you see the "cross-cut" in the trunk of the *tree*? Picture it as a chain-saw cutting you out a few **books** with which to start your own private library. [5]

木 本

225 **tag**

札

The **tags** you see hanging on *trees* in public places in Japan are helpful to identify what sort of *trees* they are. Next time you see one, imagine the bit of wire that fixes the **tag** to the branch as a large *fishhook*. REALLY imagine it, illogical as it is, and you will never have trouble with this kanji again. [5]

木 札

226 **calendar**

暦

Look at this character in reverse order, from bottom up. First we see the primitive for *days*, an appropriate enough way to begin a **calendar**. Next we see a *grove of trees* growing under a *cliff*. The laws of nature being what they are, the *trees* would be stunted under such conditions, unless they were strong enough to keep growing upwards until they passed through the layers of rock and soil, right up to the surface. Now imagine that in those little boxes marking off the *days* on your wall **calendar**, you see that very process taking place step by step: 365 or so time-lapse pictures of that *grove of trees* each month, from January under the *cliff* to December on top of the *cliff*. The story is not as complex as it sounds, particularly if you happen to have a **calendar** nearby and can flip through it with this image in mind. [14]

厂　厤　暦

227
案
plan

Without much effort, the elements *relax . . . tree* suggest a hammock strung between two *trees* in your backyard, and you stretched out in it, hands folded behind your head, **planning** something or other. After all, it's something we all do from time to time: kick up our legs on the nearest piece of furniture and daydream about the best **plan** of action to take. Be sure to relate the *relaxation* to the *tree*, so that you don't end up with something else in its place (like "legs" or "desk" or "table"). [10]

安　案

228
燥
parch

Parchment, made from animal skins, was the most common form of writing material used until the beginning of the nineteenth century. When paper took over, a method was devised to make artificial **parch**ment from *wood* pulp. The *fire* at the left and in the "strong" position reminds us of the root word, "**parch**," since nothing dries, puckers, wrinkles, and scorches quite like *fire*. And here is how we put it all together. Take a sheet of paper (a "*wood-good*,"), wet it, and hold it over a *hearth* in your mind's eye. Now watch as it **parches** the paper, leaving it with a strange and bumpy surface resembling **parch**ment. [17]

火　煰　燥

229
未
not yet

As the key word suggests, this kanji has to do with something not quite over and done with. More concretely, it shows us a *tree* that is **not yet** fully grown. The extra short stroke in the upper branches shows new branches spreading out, leaving one with the feeling that the *tree* has a ways to go yet before it reaches maturity. In other words, the kanji conveys its meaning pictographically, playing on the earlier pictograph of the *tree*. [5]

一 二 キ 未 末

230 **extremity**

末

This character is best learned in connection with that of the previous frame. The first stroke shows a branch that is longer than the main branch, indicating that the tree has reached the **extremity** of its growth, so that its branches stop spreading and start drooping downwards. Be sure to keep this imagery in mind, to avoid confusing this key word with synonyms that will appear later. [5]

一 二 キ 未 末

231 **obscure**

昧

The most **obscure** ideas are those that the *sun* of reason has *not yet* dawned on. Be sure to give the *sun* a professorial demeanor, complete with spectacles and a pipe. [9]

日 昧

232 **splash**

沫

The **splash** this kanji refers to is the dash of *water* against the rocks, with all the foam and spray that this creates. If you think of a **splash** in this sense as a wave that has run its full course and reached its *extremity,* namely the seashore, and if you think of it pictorially in your mind's eye, this somewhat rare (but oh-so-easy-to-learn) kanji is yours for good. [8]

氵 沫

233 **flavor**

味

When a tree has *not yet* finished growing, it produces fruit with a full **flavor**. When the official taster (the professional *mouth* to the left) determines that full **flavor** has been reached, the tree is pruned back so that it remains permanently *not yet* grown. A neat little agricultural trick and an easy way to see the sense of **flavor** hidden in this character. [8]

口 味

234 **younger sister**

妹

The **younger sister** in the family is the *woman* in the family who, like the newest branch in a tree, is *not yet* old enough or mature enough to do everything the elder sister can do (see FRAME 442). [8]

女 妹

235 **vermilion**

朱

That red-orange color we call **vermilion** is found in nature during the fall when the leaves lose their sugar and begin to change color. This kanji depicts the very last leaf on a tree in the fall (the *drop* hung in the first stroke), the leaf that has *not yet* fallen as it one day must. Look at its color—**vermilion**. (Well, not really. The truth is, **vermilion** is made from a mercuric sulfide, but I'm sure you will agree that autumn leaves are a lot easier to work with.) [6]

丿 𠂉 𠂉 牛 牛 朱

236 **stocks**

株

The **stocks** bought and sold on the market by the tens of millions each day get their name from a comparison to a healthy *tree,* in which one takes "**stock**" in the hopes that it will grow and produce more and more *trees* like itself. Usually good **stocks** are referred to as "blue chip," but here we are asked to associate the key word with the color *vermilion,* perhaps because one can assess the value of a tree from the color of its autumn leaves. [10]

木 株

* **flower**

艹

We are not yet equipped with all the pieces necessary to learn the character for **flower**, so shall have to content ourselves here with the first three strokes, which represent the primitive of the same meaning. Concentrate on the actual “bloom” of the **flower**, and keep a particular flower in mind. Try a rose, a tulip, or a daisy, since none of them will have their own kanji. Think about it well, since once you have decided on your **flower** of choice, you will be using it in a rather large number of stories later on. [3]

一 十 艹

237 **young**

若

Here we see a *flower* held in the *right* hand. You can imagine yourself in a magic garden where *flowers* picked with the *right* hand grant eternal **youth**; and those picked with the left, premature senility. Go ahead, pick one with each hand and watch what happens. [8]

一 十 艹 ナ 芋 若

238 **grass**

草

Perhaps you know the custom of seeding **grass** randomly or in some particular pattern with the *flower* called the crocus, which blooms for a few days each year in *early* spring. As the **grass** begins to turn green again after winter has passed, these tiny *flowers* dot up here and there. Now just look out your window at a patch of **grass** somewhere and think what a nice idea it would be to have your name spelled out in *flowers* once as a sort of *early* harbinger of spring. [9]

艹 草

239 **suffering**

苦

The picture of **suffering** we are given here is that of a *flower* that has grown *old*. When a flower ages, it pales and dries up, and

probably even **suffers**. If you think that plants are incapable of such feelings, then ask yourself why so many people believe that talking to their flowers helps them bloom better. [8]

艹 苦

240 苛

bullying

A nosegay of *flowers* make a nice gift, but if those flowers are poison oak, they *can* amount to **bullying**. Be sure to emphasize the word *can* when you repeat this little phrase to yourself. [8]

艹 苛

241 寛

tolerant

The *house* of *flowers* or "hothouse" has become a metaphor for a narrow-minded, biased, and intolerant attitude distrustful of change. **Tolerance**, in contrast, is open-minded and welcomes novelty. The way to encourage **tolerance** in those who lack it is first to have them *see* through their own hothouse attitudes, which is the very counsel we are given in this kanji. [13]

宀 宀艹 寛

242 薄

dilute

Take a good look at this kanji: the "strong" element here is really the *flower,* not the *water* as you might have thought on first glance. To the right is the *acupuncturist* from FRAME 48. Taking the key word to connote **diluting** the vital humors of the body, we can imagine our *acupuncturist* performing his task with *flowers* in place of needles, and using their hollow stems to pipe *water* into the body of the patient. [16]

艹 艹氵 薄

243 葉

leaf

Three elements are given here: *flower . . . generation . . . tree.* The first and last seem logical enough, since it is the **leaf** that feeds

the *flowers* on a *tree.* The element for *generation* interposed between the two suggests that the movement of a *tree* from one *generation* to the next is like its "turning over a new **leaf**." [12]

艹 茾 葉

*
莫

graveyard

The element shown here should be taken to represent a modern **graveyard**. Gone are the cobwebs and gnarled trees, the tilted headstones and dark, moonless nights that used to scare the wits out of our childhood imaginations. Instead, we see brightly colored *flowers* placed before the tombstones, the *sun* shining gloriously overhead, and a cuddly *St. Bernard* sitting at the gate keeping watch. [10]

艹 苷 莫

244
模

imitation

Ah, but haven't modern *graveyards* become a parody of their ancestors! The flowers are plastic, the writing on the stones is unimaginative and cold, and the whole thing looks more like a marble orchard than a right and proper graveyard. This kanji continues with the modernization trend by picturing **imitation** *trees* in the *graveyard.* But of course, how convenient! They don't need pruning or fertilizing, their leaves don't fall, and they remain the same color all year long. [14]

木 模

245
漠

vague

Think of the key word as having to do with something viewed through a haze, or in the twilight and from a distance, so that only its outlines are **vaguely** discernible. Now we are back again to the essence of the true *graveyard.* The *water* may be taken as the sound of waves dashing up against the rocks or the dripping of moisture on cold rock—anything that helps you associate **vagueness** with the *graveyard* and keep it distinct from the imitation we met in the last frame. [13]

氵 漠

246 **grave**

墓

The mounds of *soil* with crude wooden crosses set at their head suggests those boot-hill **graves** we all know from cowboy lore. The only odd thing about this kanji is that the *soil* comes UNDER the *graveyard*, rather than to its left, where we might expect. Just think of the bodies as "lying under boot-hill" if you have any trouble.

By the way, this is not the first time, nor will it be the last, that we learn a kanji whose key word is the same, or almost the same, as a primitive element based on it, but whose shape differs somewhat. There is no cause to worry. By using the primitive in a variety of other characters, as we have done here, the confusion will be averted as a matter of course. In most cases, as here, the primitive element is taken from a part of the fuller kanji. [13]

莫 墓

247 **livelihood**

暮

Imagine that you have chosen the occupation of the keeper of a *graveyard* and spend your *days* tending to other's deadhood in order to make your means of **livelihood**. [14]

莫 暮

248 **membrane**

膜

The *part of the body* first affected by a stroll through a haunted *graveyard* is the skin, which gets goose bumps. But we save the word "skin" for another kanji, and use the odd word "**membrane**" here. Think of being so scared through and through that the goose flesh moves from the outside in, giving you goose **membranes**. [14]

月 膜

249 **seedling**

苗

To avoid confusion with the image of rice seedlings to appear later, we shall take these **seedlings** out of their agricultural setting in the *rice fields* and into the frame of Brave New World surgery, where "ideas" or "values" are being implanted into *brains* like **seedlings** to insure a harmonious society. Then you need only imagine them taking root and breaking out into *flower* right through the tops of the skulls of people walking around on the streets. [8]

艹 苗

Lesson 11

Now that we have made our way through nearly 250 characters, it is time to pause and consider how you are getting on with the method introduced in this book. While this lesson will be a short one (only 15 new kanji) you might want to spend some time reviewing your progress in the light of the remarks that follow. In them I have tried to draw out the main principles that have been woven into the fabric of the text from frame to frame and lesson to lesson. Perhaps the easiest way to do this is to single out some of the typical problems that can arise:

If you can remember the key word when you see the kanji, but have trouble remembering the kanji when you have only the key word to go on…

Probably you did not take seriously the advice about studying these stories with a pad and pencil. If you try to shortcut the process by merely learning to recognize the characters for their meaning without worrying about their writing, you will find that you have missed one bird with two stones, when you could have bagged two with one. Let me repeat: study only from key word to kanji; the reverse will take care of itself.

If you find yourself having to go back to a kanji, once you have written it, to make corrections or additions…

My guess is that you are asking your visual memory to do the work that belongs to imaginative memory. After LESSON 12, you will be given more leeway to create your own images and stories, so it is important that you nip this problem in the bud before going any further. A small step in the wrong direction on a journey of 2,200 kanji will land you in deep trouble in no time. Here are the steps you should be following each time you come to a new frame:

1. Read the key word and take note of the particular connotation that has been given it. There is only one such meaning, sometimes associated with a colloquial phrase, sometimes with one of the several meanings of the word, sometimes with a well-known cultural phenomenon. Think of that connotation and repeat it to yourself. When you're sure you've got the right one, carry on.
2. Read through the particular little story that goes with the key word and let the whole picture establish itself clearly.
3. Now close your eyes, focus on those images in the story that belong to the key word and primitive elements, and let go of the controls. It may take a few seconds, sometimes as long as a minute, but the picture will start to change on its own. The exaggerated focal points will start to take on a life of their own and enhance the image with your own particular experiences and memories. You will know your work is done when you have succeeded in creating a memorable image that is both succinct and complete, both faithful to the original story and yet your very own.
4. Open your eyes and repeat the key word and primitive elements, keeping that image in mind. This will clear away any of the fog, and at the same time make sure that when you let go you didn't let go of the original story, too.
5. In your mind, juxtapose the elements relative to one another in line with your image or the way they normally appear in the characters.
6. Take pencil and paper and write the character once, retelling the story as you go.

These are basically the same steps you were led through in reading the stories, even though they were not laid out so clearly before. If you think back to the kanji that "worked" best for you, you will find that each of these steps was accomplished perfectly. And if you look back at the ones you are forgetting, you should also be able to locate which step you skipped over. In reviewing, these same steps should be followed, with the only clue to set the imagination in motion being the key word.

If you find you are forgetting the relative position of the elements in a kanji…

Before all else, go back and reread the frame for that character to see if there were any helpful hints or explanatory notes. If not, return to the frame where the particular primitives were first introduced to see if there is any clue there. And if this is not the problem, then, taking care not to add any new words or focal points to your story (since they might end up being elements later on), rethink the story in such a way that the image for each element actually takes the position it has in the kanji itself. This should not happen often, but when it does, it is worth spending a few minutes to get things sorted out.

If you are confusing one kanji with another…

Take a careful look at the two stories. Perhaps you have made one or the other of them so vivid that it has attracted extraneous elements to itself that make the two kanji images fuse into one. Or again, it may be that you did not pay sufficient attention to the advice about clarifying a single connotation for the key word.

Whether or not you have had all or only a few of these problems, now is the time to review the first 10 lessons keeping an eye out for them. Put aside any schedule you may have set yourself until you have those lessons down perfectly, that is, until you can run through all 6 steps outlined above for every character, without a hitch. The most important thing in this review is not really to see whether you are remembering the characters, but to learn how to locate problems and deal with them.

One final note before you close the book and begin running your review. Everyone's imagination works differently. Each has its own gifts and its own defects. The more you pay attention to how you imagine things, the more likely you are to find out what works best for you—and more importantly, *why*. The one thing you must distrust, if the system outlined in this book is to work for you, is your ability to remember kanji just as they are, without doing any work on them. Once you start making exceptions for characters you "know" or "have no trouble with" or "don't need to run through all the steps with," you are headed for a frustration that will take you a great deal of trouble to dig yourself out of. In other words, if you start using the method only as a "crutch" to help you only with the kanji you have trouble with, you will quickly be limping along worse than ever. What we are offering here is not a crutch, but a different way to walk.

That said, let us pick up where we left off. In this lesson we turn from primitive elements having to do with plants to those having to do with animals, 4 of them in all.

250

portent

兆

Here we have a pictograph of the back of a turtle, the two sloping vertical strokes representing the central ridge and the four short strokes the pattern. Think of reading turtle shells as a way to foretell the future, and in particular things that **portend** coming evils. [6]

丿 丿 ㇒ 兆 兆 兆

* When this character is used as a primitive in its full form, we keep the key-word sense of a *portent*. When it appears to the left in its abbreviated form (namely, the left half only, 冫), we shall give it the pictographic sense of a *turtle*.

251

peach tree

桃

To associate the **peach tree** with the primitive for a *portent*, recall the famous Japanese legend of Momotarō, the **Peach** Boy. It begins once upon a time with a fisherman and his wife who wanted badly to have a child, but none was born to them. Then one day the old man caught a giant **peach**, out of which jumped a healthy young lad whom they named **Peach** Boy. Though the boy was destined to perform heroic deeds, his birth also *portended* great misfortune (how else could he become a hero?). Thus the *tree* that is associated with a *portent* of coming evil comes to be the **peach tree**. [10]

木 桃

252

stare

眺

To give someone the "evil *eye*" is to **stare** at them, wishing them evil. The roots of the superstition are old and almost universal throughout the cultures of the world. In this kanji, too, being stared at is depicted as an *eye* that *portends* evil. [11]

目 眺

253 **dog**

犬

We know that the kanji for *large* takes on the meaning of the *St. Bernard* **dog** when used as a primitive. In this frame we finally see why. The *drop* added as a fourth and final stroke means that we have to do with a normal-sized **dog**, which, compared to the *St. Bernard,* is no more than a *drop* in the kennel. [4]

一 ナ 大 犬

* As a primitive this character can take two meanings. In the form given here it will mean a very small dog (which we shall refer to as a *chihuahua* for convenience sake). When it takes the form 犭 to the left of a character, we shall give it the meaning of *a pack of wild dogs.*

254 **status quo**

状

Did you ever hear the legend of the *turtle* who fell madly in love with a *chihuahua* but could not have her because their two families did not like the idea of their children intermarrying? Like all classic stories of ill-fated love, this one shows how the young upset the **status quo** with an emotion older and more powerful than anything their elders have devised to counter it: blind love. [7]

丨 丬 丬 状

255 **silence**

黙

Oddly enough, the character for **silence** shows us a *black chihuahua.* Actually, the cute little critter's name is Darkness, as I am sure you remember from the famous song about **silence** that begins, "Hello, Darkness, my old friend.…"

Note how the four dots reach all the way across the bottom of the character. [15]

里 默 黙

256 **sort of thing**

然

The key word in this frame refers to a suffix that gives the word before it an adjectival quality; hence we refer to it as "**sort of thing**." Reverting to the time when dog was more widely eaten than it is today (see FRAME 127), we see here a large cauldron boiling over an *oven flame* with the *flesh* of a *chihuahua* being thrown into the whole concoction to make it into a "hot-diggity, dog-diggity" **sort of thing.** [12]

ノ ク タ タ 狄 然

257 **reed**

荻

You've no doubt seen cattails, those swamp **reeds** with a furry *flower* to them like the tail of a cat. This might just turn out to be a good way to get rid of a troublesome *pack of wild dogs*: lure them into a swamp of these **reeds** with the cattail *flowers* and then set *fire* to the swamp. Take care to focus on the *flower* rather than the "cattail" to avoid confusion with FRAME 259 below. [10]

艹 艹 艿 艿 荻

258 **hunt**

狩

One of the worst problems you have to face when you go **hunting** is to *guard* your take from the *wild dogs.* If you imagine yourself failing at the task, you will probably have a stronger image than if you try to picture yourself succeeding. [9]

ノ 犭 犭 狩

259 **cat**

猫

Knowing how much dogs love to chase **cats**, picture a *pack of wild dogs* planting "**cat**-*seedlings,*" watering them, and fertilizing them until they can be harvested as a crop of **cats** for them to chase and torment. If you begin from the key word and think of a "crop of **cats**," you will not confuse this story with the apparently similar story of two frames ago. [11]

犭 猫

260

牛

cow

Can you see the "doodle" of a **cow** that has just been run over by a steamroller? The small dot in the first stroke shows its head turned to one side, and the next two strokes, the four legs. [4]

丿 𠂉 𠂉 牛

* As a primitive, the same sense of *cow* is kept. Note only that when it is placed OVER another element, its tail is cut off, giving us 𠂉. In this case, and when the element appears on the left, the stroke order is changed.

261

特

special

Despite the strong phonetic similarity, there will be no problem keeping the key word **special** distinct from the character we met earlier for *specialty* (FRAME 47), since the latter has immediate connotations lacking in this kanji.

Anyway, we shall let the key word of this frame refer to something in a **special** class all its own—like the sacred *cows* of India that wander freely without fear of being butchered and ground into hamburger. Even though the practice is originally a Hindu one, and in any case no longer followed among the majority of Japanese Buddhist monks, the Buddha's refusal to take the life of any sentient being makes it only fitting that the *cows* should be placed on the sacred grounds of a *Buddhist temple* in this kanji. [10]

丿 𠂉 牛 牜 特

262

告

revelation

Folklore throughout the world tells us of talking animals who show a wisdom superior to that of human beings, and that same tradition has found its way into television shows and cartoons right into our own century. This character depicts **revelation** through the *mouth* of a *cow,* suggesting oracular utterances about truths hidden to human intelligence. [7]

丿 𠂉 牛 生 告

263 **before**

先

Take this key word in its physical, not its temporal, sense (even though it refers to both). If you have a *cow* with *human legs,* as the elements show us here, it can only be because you have two people in a *cow*-suit. I always thought I'd prefer to be the one standing **before**, rather than the one that holds up the rear and becomes the "butt" of everyone's laughter. [6]

丿 𠂉 牛 生 𠧗 先

264 **wash**

洗

This character is so logical that one is tempted to let the elements speak for themselves: *water . . . before.* But we have already decided we will not allow such rationalism to creep into our stories. Not even this once.

Instead, let us change the character from the Peanuts comic strip called "Pigpen," who is always preceded by a little cloud of dust and grime, and rename him "**Wash**-Out." Everywhere he walks, a spray of *water* goes *before* him to sanitize everything he touches. [9]

氵 洗

Lesson 12

In this the final lesson of Part one we introduce the useful compound primitive for metals and the elements needed to form it, in addition to picking up a number of stray characters that have fallen by the wayside.

* 𠆢

umbrella

The actual kanji on which this primitive meaning **umbrella** is based will not show up until FRAME 1103. Think of it as a large and brightly-colored beach **umbrella**. If you compare this with FRAME 8, you will notice how the two strokes touch here, while the kanji for *eight* would leave a gaping leak in the top. [2]

ノ 𠆢

265 介

jammed in

The idea of something getting **jammed into** something else is depicted here by having a *walking stick* get **jammed in**to an *umbrella* frame by someone shoving it into an already occupied slot in the *umbrella* stand at the door. First notice the vertical strokes: on the left is the curved umbrella handle, and on the right the straight *walking stick*. Now try to imagine the two parties tugging at their respective properties like two kids on a wishbone, creating a scene at the entrance of an elegant restaurant. [4]

ノ 𠆢 介 介

266 界

world

As the **world** gets *jammed* with more and more people, there is less and less space. Imagine yourself taking an air flight over a **world** so densely populated that every bit of it is sectioned off like a gigantic checkerboard (the *rice fields*). If you look closely at the character, you should be able to see a kind of movement taking place as still more is being **jammed into** that already narrow space. [9]

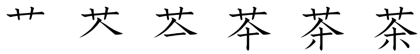
田 界

267 茶

tea

As everyone knows, **tea** is made from **tea** leaves. But the **tea** plant itself has its own *flowers,* which can be quite beautiful and add a special flavor to the **tea**, as the Chinese found out already

over 4,598 years ago. With the image of a terrace of *flowering* **tea** bushes in mind, picture a number of brightly painted and very l-o-n-g *wooden poles* (FRAME 207) placed here and there in their midst, with a tiny *umbrella* at the top to shade the delicate-tasting **tea** *flowers.* [9]

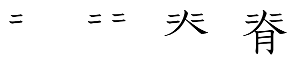


268

spinal column

脊

The **spinal column** has sprouted out of the *flesh* of your back into an *umbrella* that you always have with you, rain or shine. The pair of 2s on each side are the "ribs" of the *umbrella*. Take care to keep your image of the key word distinct from that for spine (FRAME 24). [10]



*

meeting

亼

This compound primitive depicts a **meeting** as a massive gathering of people under *one umbrella.* The full kanji from which this derives will be introduced later in FRAME 814. The important thing here is to picture the scene just described and associate it with the word **meeting**. [3]



269

fit

合

The kanji for **fit** reads literally, top to bottom, as a *meeting* of *mouths*—which is a rather descriptive way of speaking of a romantic kiss. We all know what happens when there is no meeting of minds and when people's ideas don't **fit** with one another. But this kanji invites us to imagine what happened to the romance of a certain unfortunate couple whose *mouths* didn't **fit**. [6]



270

塔

pagoda

On the left we see a mound of *dirt,* and to the right *flowers* made to *fit* together. The two sides combine to create a great **pagoda** made of *dirt,* with *flowers* by the tens of thousands *fitted* together for the roofing of each of the layers. Be sure to put yourself in the scene and *fit* a few of the *flowers* in place yourself so that the image works its way into memory with full force. [12]

土 土艹 塔

271

王

king

See what you can do to come up with a pictograph of a **king's** scepter here that suits your own idea of what it should look like. You might even begin with the basic element for *I beam* and then try to fit the remaining third stroke in. [4]

一 丅 干 王

* As a primitive, this can mean either *king* or *scepter,* but it will usually be taken to mean *ball,* as an abbreviation of the character in the next frame.

272

玉

jewel

Note the *drop* here in the king's *scepter,* which is exactly what you would expect it to be: a precious **jewel** handed down from of old as a symbol of his wealth and power. [5]

王 玉

* As a primitive, we can use this to mean either *jewel* or *ball.* When it appears anywhere other than on the left side of a kanji, it generally takes the same shape as here. On the left, it will be lacking the final stroke, making it the same as the character in the previous frame, 𤣩.

273 **treasure**

宝

Every *house* has its **treasure**, as every thief knows only too well. While the things we **treasure** most are usually of sentimental value, we take the original sense of the term **treasure** here and make it refer to *jewels* kept in one's *house*. [8]

宀 宝

274 **pearl**

珠

Take care to keep the meaning of this kanji distinct from that for *jewel*. Think of the most enormous **pearl** you have ever seen, a great *vermilion*-colored *ball* sitting on your ring—and making it extremely difficult to move without falling over from the weight of the thing. [10]

𤣩 珠

275 **present**

現

Do not think of a "gift" here, but of the **present** moment, as distinct from the future and the past. The kanji gives us a *ball* in which we see the **present**—obviously a crystal *ball* that enables us to *see* things going on at the **present** in faraway places. [11]

𤣩 現

276 **toy**

玩

If, at some aboriginal level, **Toys Я Us**, then the archetypal *ball* must have been there at the *beginning*, before evolving into beach balls, ping-pong balls, rugby balls, and marbles. [8]

𤣩 玩

277 **lunatic**

狂

A **lunatic** is literally one driven mad by the light of the moon, and the most famous of the "**looneys**" are the legendary lycanthropes or "wolfmen." Sometimes the transformation is only

a temporary phenomenon, sometimes it is permanent. In the latter case, the poor chap takes off on all fours to live with the beasts. To remember this kanji, imagine one of these lycanthropes going **looney** and setting himself up as *king* of a *pack of wild dogs* that roams about and terrorizes innocent suburban communities. [7]

犭 狂

278 旺 **effulgent**

The radiant, **effulgent** splendor of the *sun* makes it *king* of all the planets and other stars. Just to be sure you don't take this too abstractly, picture the *sun* seated on a throne, flourishing its *scepter* this way and that. [8]

日 旺

279 皇 **emperor**

An **emperor**, as we all know, is a ruler—something like a *king* but higher in status. The *white bird* perched above the *king*, elevating him to **imperial** heights, is the messenger he sends back and forth to the gods to request advice and special favors, something that *white birds* have long done in folklore throughout the world. [9]

白 皇

280 呈 **display**

The trick to remembering this character lies in associating the key word with the line from the nursery rhyme about 4 and 20 blackbirds baked in a pie: "Wasn't this a dainty dish to set before the *king*?" If we think of **display** in terms of that famous line, and the *king* with his head thrown back and his *mouth* wide open as 4 and 20 blackbirds fly in one after the other, we shall have satisfied both the elements and their position. [7]

口 呈

281 全 **whole**

Wholeness suggests physical and spiritual health, "having your act together." The kanji-image for **wholeness** depicts being "*king* under your own *umbrella,*" that is, giving order to your own life. I know it sounds terribly abstract, but what could be more abstract than the word **whole**? [6]

𠆢 全

282 栓 **plug**

Here we think of **plug** in the sense of a cork or stopper used to seal the mouth of a bottle, water faucet, or something with liquid running out of it. Forgetting the abstract picture of the former frame, let us work with all the primitive units: *tree . . . umbrella . . . ball.* Imagine a *tree* with a faucet in the side out of which tennis *balls* are flowing, bouncing all over the ground by the hundreds. You fight your way up to it and shove your giant beach *umbrella* into the *tree* to **plug** it up. [10]

木 栓

283 理 **logic**

We first referred to this character back in FRAME 185, to which you might want to return to have a peek. The image of **logic** we are given is something like a central *jewel* in a *computer,* like the *jewels* in old clocks that keep them running smoothly. Try to picture yourself making your way through all the RAMS and ROMS and approaching this shining *jewel,* a chorus of voices and a blast of trumpets in the background heralding the great seat of all-knowing **logic**. [11]

𤣩 理

284 主 **lord**

"A man's home is his castle," goes the proverb from an age where it was the male who was **lord** of the household. Fundamentally, it means only that every one of us is a bit (or *drop*) of a *king* in

our own environment. As for the positioning of the elements, if you take care to "read off" the primitives in this way, you won't end up putting the *drop* down below, where it turns the kanji into a jewel. [5]

丶 主

* As a primitive element, we set the key word aside entirely and take it as a pictograph of a solid brass *candlestick* (with the drop representing the flame at the top).

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285 **pour**

注

Picture **pouring** *water* from a lighted *candlestick*. What could be more ridiculous, or simpler, as a way to recall this kanji? [8]

氵 注

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286 **pillar**

柱

The **pillar** referred to here is the *wooden* beam that stands at the entrance to a traditional Japanese house. Carve it in imagination into the shape of a gigantic *candlestick* and your work is done. [9]

木 柱

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287 **gold**

金

If this were not one of the most common characters you will ever have to write, I would apologize for having to give the explanation that follows. Anyway, we want to depict bars of **gold** bullion with an *umbrella* overhead to shade them from the heat (and perhaps to hide them as well). The bullion is made by melting down all the *scepters* of the kingdom, *drop* by *drop*, and shaping them into bars. [8]

丿 人 亼 亼 仐 仐 余 金

* As a primitive, it means not only *gold* but any *metal* at all.

288

pig iron

銑

Pig iron refers to iron in the crude form in which it emerges from the smelting furnaces. Of all the various forms *metal* can take, this one shows us metal *before* it has been refined. Imagine two photographs labeled "*before*" and "after" to show the process. [14]

金 銑

289

bowl

鉢

Let **bowl** suggest a large and heavy *golden* **bowl** into which you are throwing all the *books* you own to mash them into pulp, for some outrageous reason you will have to think up yourself. [13]

金 鉢

290

copper

銅

Picture an order of *monks* serving as chaplains for the police force. Their special habit, made of protective *metal,* is distinguished by a row of **copper** buttons just like the "**cops**" they serve. [14]

金 銅

291

angling

釣

The character we learned for *fishing* (FRAME 184) refers to the professional, net-casting industry, while the **angling** of this character refers to the sport. The odd thing is that your **angling** rod is a *golden ladle* which you are using to scoop *gold*fish out of a river. [11]

金 釣

292 **needle**

針

In FRAME 10 we referred ahead to this full character from which the primitive for *needle* (on the right) derives. Since we already expect that **needles** are made of *metal,* let us picture a set of solid *gold* darning *needles* to complete the kanji. [10]

金 針

293 **inscription**

銘

Take **inscription** in the sense of the *name* you ask the jeweler to carve on a *gold* bracelet or inside a *gold* ring to identify its owner or communicate some sentimental message. It will help if you can recall the first time you had this done and the feelings you had at the time. [14]

金 銘

294 **tranquilize**

鎮

The first lie-detector machines of the twentieth century worked by wiring pieces of *metal* to the body to measure the amount of sweat produced when questions were asked. It was discovered that nervousness produced more sweat, indicating subconscious reactions when the *truth* was getting too close for comfort. Nowadays, people can take drugs that **tranquilize** them in such a way as to neutralize the effect of the device, which is why other means have had to be developed. [18]

金 鎮

With that, we come to the end of Part One. Before going on to Part Two, it would be a good idea to return now to the Introduction and read it once again. The explanation of the method we are following here and the rationale behind it should make more sense now.

By this time, too, you should be familiar with the use of all four of the

Indexes. If not, take a few minutes to go through them one by one, reading the introduction to each and taking note of how they are arranged. As the number of characters you have learned increases, you will find them useful in navigating your way back to kanji or primitive elements that need reviewing in their original context.